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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the six bimonthly issues published during 1998 of a newsletter-like periodical focusing on home schooling and providing parents in the United States and other nations with ideas, activities, research summaries, and resources to teach their children at home. Each issue contains short news items and reports on home schooling, letters from parents, information on the challenges and concerns of home schooling, a focus topic, book and resource reviews, and a resource and information list. Feature reports and letters from parents include the following: (1) "How Homeschooling Becomes Kids' Own Choice" (Jan-Feb); (2) "Homeschooling Children with Special Needs" (Mar-Apr); (3) "Older Kids Learn from Younger" (May-Jun); (4) "Overcoming Fear and Shyness" (Jul-Aug); (5) "Can We Be Friends Even If We're Different?" (Sep-Oct); and (6) "Creating Our Own Ceremonies" (Nov-Dec). (KB)

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U.S. $6 | Issue 120 | Jan./Feb. '98

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George Dennison on Reading Aloud

Homeschool Resource Centers

ED 427 885

How Homeschooling Becomes Kids' Own Choice

The Power of Mindful Learning

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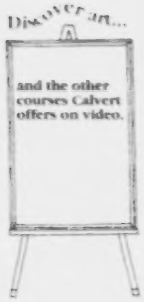

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GWS

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In this issue

Are homeschoolers out of school because they want to be or only because their parents want them to be? The answer is fairly obvious for those who leave school at age 14 or 15 or 16, having read *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* or talked to homeschoolers or taken themselves down to the library to research school attendance laws. But for long-time homeschoolers, the moment of choice is less apparent and often less distinct. If homeschooling is all they've ever known, if they can barely remember their family's original decision to begin it, how do we know that they're not just going along with something someone else decided for them?

To some degree, all kids go along with choices their parents have previously made – choices about how many children to have, for example, or where to live. Kids are born into circumstances, and affected by choices, about which they had no say. And it seems to me that for much of early childhood, they take these kinds of choices pretty much for granted. If homeschooling has been part of one's landscape since one was very young, it's just an aspect of *how things are*. Societal bias in favor of schooling does lead some kids to question homeschooling early on, of course. But there appears to be a very particular way in which the question surfaces again, for many, at around age 12 or so. Suddenly, what was just taken for granted is now open to evaluation.

Often, this time of life is in general a time of *waking up*, of noticing and thinking about aspects of one's life and one's family that one had previously accepted unquestioningly. I don't think I've known a long-time homeschooler who hasn't had to reckon with the institution of schooling somehow, to figure out what it means to them and how they want to stand in relation to it. Some may actually enroll in school in order to do this (to test themselves against it, to understand it firsthand, to come to terms with it in some way). Others simply think about it, talk about it, learn about it in ways other than full immersion. What's common is the experience of making, or re-making, the homeschooling choice for oneself – first by realizing that it *is* a choice and that although it might have been their parents' choice originally, it can now be theirs, too, and then by thinking that choice through. Often it's a matter of confirming, for oneself, what the family has been saying for years, or of consciously articulating what had been silently assumed.

When young people come out on the other side of this exploration and re-evaluation, if they're still homeschooling, they're stronger for having questioned it, more fully aware of it as their own choice and of the reasons for having made that choice. In some sense, they may be more burdened than they were before, because now they think through and continually evaluate what they could once simply engage in. But if real freedom means being able to say no to something as fully as one can say yes, then after taking ownership of the homeschooling choice these young people are actually freer than they were before.

– Susannah Sheffer

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News & Reports

Homeschooling in France

Sophie Haesen writes from Vieux-Ferrette, France:

In GWS, there hasn't been much about the homeschooling situation in France for a while, so I will try to update you. As far as I know, there are now two homeschooling associations: Les Enfants d'Abord, who work on a nationwide level, and L'Ecole a la Maison, who are mainly in the area of Grenoble. A lot of families who homeschool here, though, are doing this on an individual basis and do not participate in any associations at all. That's what makes it so difficult to estimate any numbers of homeschoolers in France.

The legal situation is pretty clear, as the law states that education, not schooling, is compulsory from age 6 on, and that this education can be received either at a public or private school or at home, by the parents or by any other person the parents designate. You have to inform the mayor of your town and the regional Board of Education about your decision to homeschool your child at least two weeks before school starts again after the summer holidays, or any time during school terms if you want to take your child out of school during the year. Controls are requested by the law at ages 8, 10, and 12, mainly to check the knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic and to decide what to do if this knowledge is not judged sufficient.

Though the law states these conditions quite clearly, the regional or local authorities do not always know about them. Sometimes families are asked to prove their qualifications, to hand in a detailed curriculum, to have their child tested every year, etc. Sometimes a social worker comes around unannounced to have a closer look at the family's living conditions. The parents do not always insist on their rights, partly because they simply do not know them, partly because they depend on some public money and are afraid to make too many waves. It seems that it's mostly families with rather alternative lifestyles who are bothered, maybe because the authorities do not always consider a rather marginal lifestyle and keeping the child away from school (since school is supposed to integrate marginals) to be good for a child.

Recently, homeschooling has been discussed in the media here when a child died from malnutrition. The child's parents are members of a spiritual group that lives in a very secluded manner and whose members homeschool their children. This caused a general discussion about the rights of the family and state (not so much in favor of the parents), but it was soon replaced by other issues. The new French government has put changes in the educational system on their list of priorities, but so far homeschooling has not been mentioned. It is obvious that the school system here, which is based on concurrence and a multitude of subjects which are all considered important, creates too many losers, and the expression "l'échec scolaire" (school failure) can be heard everywhere. The solutions proposed by the minister of education include making reading obligatory in kindergarten, introducing a new subject, "citizenship," as early as possible, and generally underlining school's responsibility to educate children.

Probably more than 99% of all French children go to school (and between 90 and 95% attend kindergarten from age 3 on), and most people find it strange to hear that a family chooses the homeschooling option when there's such a perfect way to delegate responsibility to school. Our oldest son is now 6 and we have been feeling social pressure to enroll him in school since he was 3. When discussing this subject with others, we did not argue but just explained again and again our point of view. Meanwhile, our decision is at least being tolerated in our village, and nobody asks anymore what we will decide for our three younger kids, as this is pretty obvious. That's fine with us, as we feel well-integrated anyway and don't think we should try to convince others of our choice. If our example is getting others interested in homeschooling, so much the better.

Apart from the different associations' newsletters, there is no nationwide French publication for families' needs yet. As I feel that there's a need for an independent, practical magazine, I am right now busy getting the first issue of a bimonthly or quarterly newsletter on its way. So, if you live in France or know homeschoolers there, spread the word.

For addresses of French homeschooling organizations, see p. 51.

Poll Results Show Wider Public Acceptance of Homeschooling

GWS reader Rosalie Schultz sent us a clipping from the 8/27/97 Chicago Tribune *with the headline "Homeschooling is Earning Higher Grades." From that article:*

The home school movement – parents teaching children in their houses instead of sending them to school – is gaining wider acceptance across the U.S. although a majority of Americans oppose the idea, according to an annual education survey.

The 29th Gallup Poll on public attitudes toward schools shows a continued softening of opposition to home schooling since the survey began asking the question 12 years ago. In 1985, the poll showed that only 16 percent of respondents considered home schooling a "good thing" while 73 percent said it was a "bad thing" and the other 11 percent were undecided. But in the 1997 poll made public Tuesday, 36 percent said homeschooling is a "good thing," 57 percent viewed it as a "bad thing" and 7 percent had no opinion.

Twelve years ago, only a few thousand parents taught their chil-

dren at home. Now the number has soared to 1.23 million, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association.

This year, the home school movement won more attention when Rebecca Sealfon, 13, of Brooklyn, N.Y., won the national spelling bee, and Beth Dorman, 13, of the Portage Park neighborhood on Chicago's Northwest Side, won the city spelling bee for the third consecutive year. Both are taught at home by their parents.

Also thrust into the limelight last week was another Chicago-area child taught at home: Alexandra Rose, 10, of west suburban Woodridge, became the first child to present a research paper earlier this month at a scientific conference on insects in Tucson. Her 16-week study on spiders has been so well-received that she has been invited to present her findings in October at the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

... The Gallup Poll, commissioned by *Phi Delta Kappan*, a professional education journal in Bloomington, Ind., showed that 88 percent of respondents want a requirement that home schools guarantee a minimum level of educational quality.

Report from Not Back to School Camp

Grace Llewellyn writes:

Of all the adventures and misadventures I've had since publishing *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, Not Back to School Camp seems to have generated the most excitement and curiosity among the homeschooling community. For that matter, it's generated a lot of excitement, satisfaction, and inspiration for me, too. In the past few years I've undertaken a number of projects that worked and didn't work to varying degrees. In a way, each project is an attempt both to offer useful help *and* to test and explore the ideas about learning that I've felt passionate about since discovering John Holt's books ten years ago. With NBTSC, it seems that many of the successful elements of my other projects have combined to great synergistic effect, and that I've learned enough about what not to do that we've been able to avoid major mistakes.

Camp is a rather ecstatic experience for most people involved. To be sure, there's quite a bit of stress involved for me, my husband Skip, and the cooks – that just seems to be the nature of putting on a huge event for the first few times (it's *intense* to coordinate 120 lives for a whole week: food, agreements, chores, schedules, lodging, dishes, sleep, lack of sleep, noise, safety, romance ... !) But it's never the stress that I remember. When I'm asked what camp is like, two things stand out. First, it's like 120 people get together and all fall in love with each other at once. I've rarely experienced such a supportive, genuinely accepting environment among people of any age. Anyone who *still* questions whether homeschoolers are adequately socialized really ought to spend five minutes – just about any five minutes – at NBTSC. As one of the staff people wrote, "I noticed how much I continue to assume that teenagers are going to treat each other badly – and how I was proved wrong again and again. I feel like most of those kids are real role models for me in terms of how to interact with others."

Second: when I decided, the first year, that the schedule would be as open and non-compulsory as possible, I had no idea what to expect. Except for a short daily morning meeting, practically nothing was required. The daytime schedule was filled with workshops taught by campers and staff – 20-30 workshops and sports games to choose from each day (about 5 running at once). I had no idea whether people would actually go to workshops or whether they would just lie around in the sun talking (which would have been fine too). Well, as it turned out, the workshops thrived. The week is a sort of relaxed flurry of activity – people sharing their skills and interests with other people who are eager to learn. Many of the workshops schedule repeat sessions, and a heap of spontaneous, informal skill-sharing happens too. (Workshops encompass everything from swing dance to web page design to co-counseling to cob oven building to poetry writing to beginning Portuguese to tree identification ...).

Of course, this is not merely a statement about what happens at camp, but also yet another affirmation that freedom works, that people who are not forced to participate in or study certain subjects (and who are *accustomed* to freedom, not just experiencing it for the first time, which can be quite different) are generally eager and happy to seize learning opportunities. So I guess I could also say: anyone who *still* believes that unschooling can't work because most kids aren't motivated ought to spend five minutes at NBTSC.

Of course, these truths about socialization and motivation would also be obvious to doubters who spent an hour or two spying on random unschoolers in their ordinary daily lives, but there's something powerful about witnessing it in the lives of 102 unschoolers at once (or 120 if you count the staff, which you certainly should). And certainly, since many of the kids feel rather isolated in their home towns, it's also great affirmation for them. Sometimes it's easier to see that something's working when you see it reflected in someone else's life, or when a peer says to you, "Wow, I'm really inspired that you taught yourself to speak Hawaiian." As for me, although I never deeply doubt that unschooling works, it's certainly a booster shot to spend a week *watching* it work.

In these respects, the week itself, if it were an isolated experience, would be enough. But it's even better because of what happens afterward: many campers continue to pursue intensely an interest they were first exposed to at camp, and lots continue to build their new friendships throughout the year. Several parents report that kids who never used to write (or spell) anything are now writing dozens of letters every month. Once again, affirmation that we don't need to learn skills because we'll need them "someday"; rather, when we need them, we'll be able and motivated to learn them then.

Registration is now open for 1998 Not Back to School Camp, for homeschoolers ages 13-18, Aug. 28-Sept. 4 or Sept. 13-20. Complete info $1 from PO Box 1014, Eugene OR 97440 or see www.geocities.com/Athens/7325.index.html ◆

Homeschool Resource Centers

How do homeschooling families share information, organize group activities, and gain access to materials that are too expensive for one family to buy? Support groups often dream of creating resource centers, but space in many communities is hard to come by. Here are stories of two different efforts to meet this need.

The Otherwise Club

Leslie Barson writes from England:

In 1990, when my son was 7, I felt that he lacked a situation in which he *worked* with other home-educated children on a consistent basis. I was interested in forming a group in which children would work together, and I advertised my idea in our country's national newsletter for homeschoolers and through word of mouth. I found there to be interest in a group, both for the children's sake and so that the parents could get some regular time off (this was a real part of the success of the group, but obviously if the children were not happy this reason would not be enough to have kept the group going).

We began with 10 children between the ages of 5 and 9. We met once a week at my home on Croxley Road, and the children named the group The Croxley Club. They did various projects such as studying the myths and society of Ancient Greece and putting on a Greek tragedy, written by one of the children, at a local church hall.

As the children got older and bigger, I wanted my house back! I also had always thought that there would be a hut somewhere in London where home-educated teenagers would be able to go hang out with their friends in a safe and relatively adultless environment, or a place where home-educated children and their parents could go, meet each other, find support and community, and study any subject or do any project they wanted to. This sort of enviroment did not seem to be around.

I approached a local community center and said we would like to come two days a week for £2000 a year (a figure I thought would be possible to meet: 20 families could pay a membership fee of £100 a year). To my amazement, the center agreed. We moved our club there in February 1993. With the original families plus those that came in response to another advertisement in the national homeschooling magazine, we had 13 families the first day. I was in a terrible panic as there was nothing to do! I took an idea I'd gotten from reading about Sudbury Valley School that there should be a board where people write up if they are doing something that others can join in or, conversely, if they would like to study something. Nowadays we still use this wall a bit, but mostly to advertise trips. What happens at the club is chosen more by word of mouth these days, but still very much in the consensus style.

Members renamed the club The Otherwise Club in those early weeks. We now meet two days a week. On Thursdays, we are open to all those with at least one child of school-age out of school. The Club provides the space for workshops and activities for families. We have three regular workshops – drama, pottery, and a science group for younger children – and we run a number of other activities. Past workshops have included country dancing, visits from police dogs and their handlers, and talks by various experts in areas such as math, home education, and health. Recent workshops have included African drumming at several different levels and a workshop on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a trip to see the play.

The community center has wonderful pottery materials, and we have had a pottery lesson since the beginning (we had a teacher for four years; now the lesson is run by a parent volunteer). We have also had several drama groups led by an outside teacher. Our children are quite confident and know what they like and we have found that some teachers from outside are not able to cope with this, so we have to choose carefully.

TOC has a small café which serves a vegetarian homemade lunch and cake as well as tea and coffee. This provides a small amount of funds and serves as a focal point for the community. We also keep a small lending library about alternative education and a large amount of information about activities and exhibitions in London. Further, we have a resource library which includes items that are too expensive for members to buy, such as a microscope, an aquascope, large detailed maps of Europe and the world, and camping equipment. For a small fee, members may borrow any item.

On Wednesdays, TOC runs a group for the 8-14-year-olds that studies one topic chosen by consensus for that year. I suggest possible subject matter and the group decides. We studied the Thames last year and finished with four days in Windsor. As leader/facilitator I choose what we do but I am very open to the children changing it or not doing it at all. Nothing is compulsory in any way. I try to choose activities that are more ' possible in groups. We made a film at the end of last term, for example. This year we are studying sports – the politics, the physiology, and three particular sports in depth.

The organizational structure of TOC is very loose. In the beginning, we tried to have meetings for everyone every two weeks, but we found that the children were not interested in the meetings. The meetings are now every six weeks or so, and instead we have an internal newsletter that was edited by one of the young people for two years and has now passed to various adults. Minutes of any meetings go into it as well as plans for the future and anything else anyone would like to put in.

This past June, our structure became more formalized as we wanted to apply for charitable status. Each family has one vote but must attend TOC for one year before they can vote at meetings. This was because we have many visitors who are at different stages of understanding both home education and what TOC is trying to do. Giving the family one vote was the only way young people under 18 could have legal rights to vote in the company. But even though we now have a legal structure, little has changed about the informality of the meetings and the atmosphere of TOC.

I tend to be the main coordinator of events (which is very important), but the ideas come from all members, including the children. Their input is much more informal but most important and taken very seriously. If people want to offer something, the word goes around and if there is enough interest and no one objects, the event happens. So far, most of what has been suggested has been done.

I am not sure if the optimum number of members for such a center can ever be legislated. It changes depending on the length of time the people involved have known each other and have been home-educating and also on the problems they have. Over the years we have learned that it is crucial to the health and atmosphere of TOC that the people who come get to know each other and that we have only a few families who are really in trouble. But it's impossible to legislate for these different possibilities, so we have to take it as it comes and try to sort each situation out.

We have had problems with new families wanting a more structured approach. The feel of the club at first seems chaotic, as one newish parent explained to me recently. At first she thought there was no structure at all, but after coming three or four times she realized there was a structure, but it was flexible. I also hope it allows each person to create their own day, as no activity is compulsory but a financial commitment to the classes is required for a six-week period.

One of the less obvious strengths of the club is its support for the adults. Although people are very different, there is a supportive communal atmosphere. We have had several families who were suffering from some problems. They are our success stories, both for the suffering families themselves and for the club's self-confidence. Over the years, we have all been able to grow and to develop our own ways of educating and a growing confidence in our own abilities – a very gratifying outcome. Although the club only meets once a week for most people and TOC will not take over the education of the children (i.e. become a school), it has become a part of the members' home education, for both the children and the adults.

In a Home, in a Library

Lucy Clark of Oklahoma writes:

Our homeschool group's resource center was originally set up in one member's home. We had books, magazines, and materials (such as math manipulatives and science equipment) available, and at certain specified times, the center was open for families to come by, look at the materials, and borrow them if they chose. The procedure we set up for lending materials was that whoever had donated the material would name a replacement price. To borrow that item, a family would leave a deposit of that amount of money, and the deposit would be refunded once the item was returned.

At the beginning, the center was open one afternoon a week, but since not enough people came during that time, the family in whose home the center was set up cut the hours back to twice a month.

The center lasted for a couple of years in this form. I think it was a good idea, but there were also some challenges and difficulties involved in having it in a family home. It was frustrating, for example, when very few people would come during the designated hours but then some families would drop by at other times during the month, when the center's hosts weren't prepared for visitors. Having a separate public space for a resource center would really be ideal and would offer greater access for families who wanted to use it.

We have found a modified version of this in the public library. By the time we had decided to close down our resource center in the member's home, we had accumulated several books on homeschooling, some of which their owners did not want back and some of which were review copies that publishers had sent to our newsletter. The desire to share resources with the community was still a priority for our group, so it seemed only natural to pass these books along to the local public library.

The children's head librarian was pleased with our offer of books because she recognized the need for homeschooling resources. She could see, more than we could, how many homeschoolers used the library daily. Sometimes the librarians were asked questions that they couldn't answer. During our conversation, I told the head librarian what we had tried to offer through our resource center, described our problems in maintaining it and our regrets at closing it. "Why reinvent the wheel?" she asked. The library was already established as an information source, was open every day, and was easily accessible. Having homeschooling resources available at the library seemed the perfect situation both because of accessibility and because the library was truly neutral territory, not exclusive to any group, so it would be expected to provide information from all political, religious, and philosophical viewpoints without apology.

The library generously offered us an entire file drawer with several legal-sized hanging files as our own homeschool resource drawer. I purchased a few expanding files and three-prong notebooks and filled each one with specific information gathered from a variety of sources. Categories were local, state, and national resources, computer resources, college and high school resources. There was also a notebook titled Questions and Answers that included Q's and A's from different perspectives.

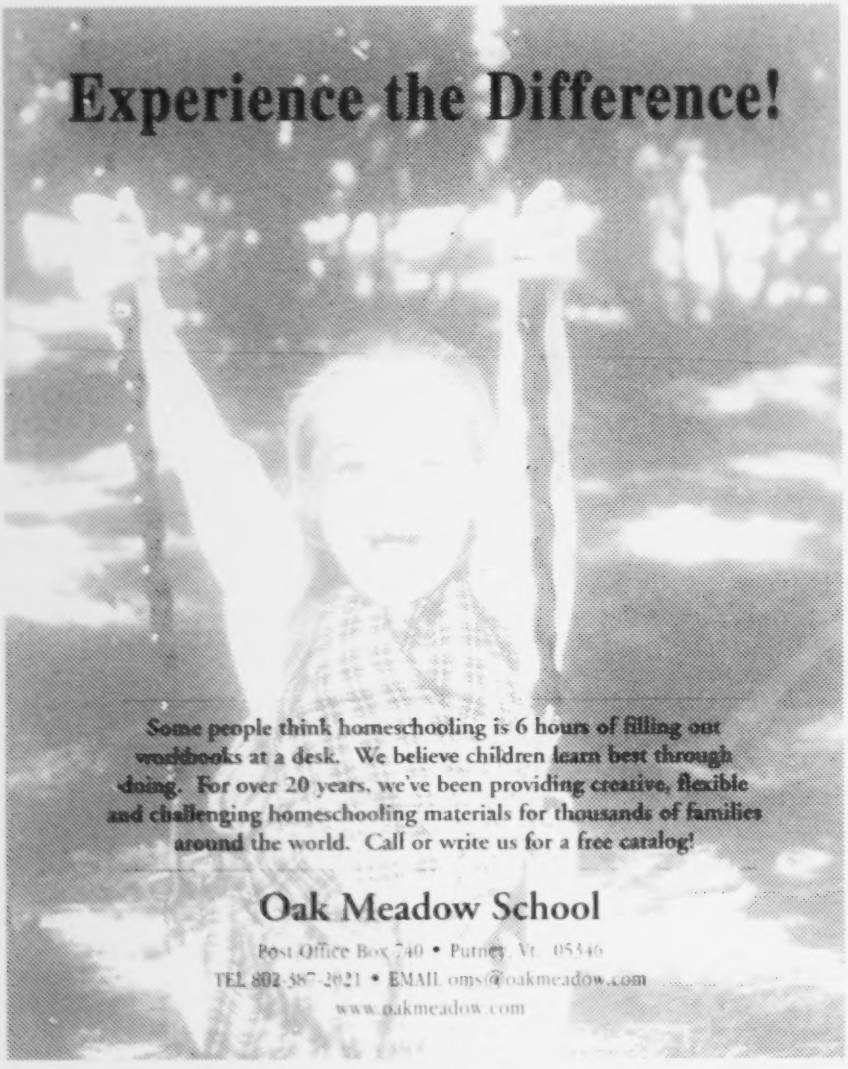
Also in the files was a copy of the state's education laws and a copy of educational skills required at each grade level. We filled other files with an assortment of newsletters, homeschooling magazines, catalogs, and, although limited, some sample

curriculums.

One file was marked "free" and was filled with extra copies of catalogs and information brochures that could be taken home. I was somewhat surprised that this particular file was not touched much at first, but I was even more surprised when the other notebooks and newsletters turned up missing. I waited over four months for their return (a couple did return but then turned up missing again). Because I hadn't considered this possibility, I hadn't kept inventory of exactly what was in the notebooks. Much of the information in them had been collected over the years by picking up flyers at conferences, purchasing information packets from various groups, and requesting brochures. Even though the removal of the notebooks may have been a one-time fluke, I decided that it was not worth the time and expense to replace all the material. Instead, there are now new notebooks with just an address and phone listing of local, state, and national resources, curriculum and correspondence suppliers, with brief descriptions. This information is all in my computer so it can be more easily replaced if necessary. Resources in the homeschooling field are expanding so rapidly that it is hard to keep up; nevertheless, even though our resource file is not complete, it is a more diversified list than I have ever seen published. We do still have some remaining newsletters, catalogs, and curriculum samples in the files, and we have a current events file that I am hoping will become known as a source of information for any homeschooler in the area, in addition to whatever information their support group may provide (or as a source for a family that doesn't currently belong to a group).

Should legislation arise here that needs homeschoolers' attention, I hope to have a file that presents different sides of the issue so people can make an informed decision. Phone tree alerts in the past have come from only one source and provided little information.

Whenever we are able to re-establish a committee to oversee the resource drawer at the library, I think it will become a much better resource than it is now. I would like to see more current publications represented, which might be feasible with more people subscribing to publications and then donating copies after reading them. It will also be good to have others helping with ideas, keeping an eye on the files, and keeping them up to date, since this is difficult for me to do alone on a consistent basis. I'd also like to have one person in charge of on-line resources. For now, the file drawer is serving the need and the librarians tell me it is often looked through. I'm sure it is helpful to the librarians to have something to refer people with homeschooling questions to, and I can only imagine how exciting it must be to someone just beginning to inquire about homeschooling to find so much information in one place. For me, it is deeply satisfying to be unifying into one place such diverse resources that the homeschooling community has to offer. ◆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Connections and Networking Opportunities

Round-Robin Stories by Mail:

Several years ago we took part in round-robin story writing organized by another GWS reader. We had great fun with this; it was interesting and challenging working with other writers, and it gave us some motivation to do some writing that we might otherwise never get around to. We'd like to offer to organize it again. The way it works is this: each story group consists of four writers. You start by writing page one of a story and you send it on to partner #2. As you mail or fax your installment, you will be receiving page one of another story, and you will add on to that one by writing page two. Then you'll pass it on and receive another, and so on until all four stories are completed. Eventually the story you started comes back to you, completed, and you get to see copies of the three other completed stories. Each writer has contributed a page to each story. You have two weeks to complete each writing installment. This is open to kids and adults and I will try to match you with three others within your age range. If you would like to take part, please send a SASE by January 25, 1998 to Nancy Deaver, 576 Croydon Dr, Elko NV 89801. Please include your names and ages and whether or not you have a fax number. Also, any (small) donations for copying costs are welcome.

Bartering Translations:

I'm a writer living in Frankfurt, Germany. Usually I write in German for German magazines, but sometimes I do English translations of my work or write for American magazines. I'm searching for someone to discuss my English work with, someone who could read it and clear it of any "Germanisms" and help with English syntax and idioms. In exchange for this, I offer to help with German texts or to discuss your writing with you. Please write to: Sonja Werle, Bleiweissstrasse 36a, 60599 Frankfurt, Germany, fax 49-69-655577.

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Talking About Homeschooling

How Should a 6-Year-Old Answer?

Kristin Podemski (IL) writes:

Now that my older daughter is noticeably school age, she frequently gets asked, "How is school going?" She always gives the questioner a vacant look, as the question means nothing to her. I then intercede and explain that we don't "do" formal schooling. Which of course leads to further explanation. I've tried to explain to my daughter that our daily living is our schooling and to just answer that schooling is going well, or whatever. Do you know of any easy answer to that difficult question, one that makes sense both to my daughter and to the questioner?

[SS:] I replied:

I'm not sure, from your description, if the people who ask "How is school going?" literally mean *school*, or if they already know that your daughter homeschools and are using that question to inquire how her homeschooling life is going. If they don't know she's a homeschooler, I can see how you or she might want to say, "We homeschool," before going any further. But from your further comments it sounds as if maybe many of the people you encounter do know she's homeschooling, so what they're really asking is, "How's homeschooling going?" In any case, it seems to me that people who ask a question like that of any 6-year-old, in school or not, are just trying to make conversation with the child on a basic friendly level. They don't mean, "How are you really doing? Are you up to grade level?" and that sort of thing. More likely, they just mean, "How's life? What kinds of things do you like to do these days?" So I think if you told your daughter that she can interpret the question that way, she could then answer with something like, "Fine, I've been having fun learning about dinosaurs" or whatever she feels like saying (and I don't mean her answer has to make reference to something that seems academic; she can really say anything that she's enjoyed doing lately). Or, as you suggest, she could just leave it at "Fine," and say no more if she doesn't feel like saying more (I'm sure this will often depend on how well she knows the person). As long as she comes to understand that she can interpret the question as simply, "How are you? What's new?", I think it'll feel easier for her.

We'd love to hear from others, especially other kids, on this question.

Enjoying "The Conversation"

Deborah Goldeen (CA) writes:

It is always enlightening to hear young people speak for themselves. Regarding Amanda Bergson-Shilcock's words in GWS #118, it is not surprising to me that discussing homeschooling with those not acquainted with such ideas has figured so prominently in her experience. I hope that this has not proved too much of a burden to her. "The Conversation," as Amanda calls it, is usually a weekly occurrence in my life, though during September it comes up at least twice a week.

Due to a talkative temperament, I usually enjoy The Conversation. There is the occasional hostile person, but it's usually the type of person who is fairly unpleasant in the first place, and it's best just to ignore them. Many of my Conversations are not hostile at all. Just yesterday, an acquaintance called me because her grandson is having difficulty in school. She said that he's an active boy. It seems to me that throughout all of human history, we have had to work our buns off. For many millenia, the most active and energetic among us have been great assets, and it is only now that children are required to sit all day that society has a problem with active and energetic children. When I told this to my acquaintance, she said, "Oh, that makes me feel so much better."

Another acquaintance called me the week before. The problem her son has with school, or rather, the problem school has with her son, is that he is easily distracted by the other children in the room, and doesn't finish his assignments. His mother is a computer programmer. I asked her, "How many other people are in the room with you when you are working?" Bing! The light went on. Could she even remotely conceive of attempting to concentrate in a room with 26 other people? Never. We talked for over an hour and by the end of it she was in tears. She had been convinced by the school that there was something wrong with her son. Hearing something about homeschooling ideas has allowed this woman to attain an equal footing with the school authorities. She is, I hope, now more able to make decisions for her son which will truly be in his best interest. In any case, her relief was enormous.

Not only is The Conversation very liberating for people, but it lays a vital foundation for the possibility of political change. It is my fondest hope that, at some point in the future, the U.S. will abandon compulsory schooling. If and when the opportunity arises for this to happen, its success or failure will rest on public opinion. And it is through The Conversation that public opinion is changed.

Dealing with Critics

Ann Lahrson Fisher's book Homeschooling in Oregon: The Handbook *contains a chapter called "When People Criticize Your Decision to Homeschool." Ann has given us permission to excerpt from it here:*

How can a family present its choice to learn together at home as a serious, carefully considered decision without inviting a barrage of criticism? When the decision to homeschool is under attack, how can parents best use the moment to educate their critics? Most importantly, how can critics be turned into allies?

If you make three key assumptions about the criticism, you will be far

better able to speak effectively and respectfully when defending your decision to homeschool.

First, assume that the people who criticize really do have the best interests of your children at heart. Even if the assumption is false, you will generate more respect for being different by setting a tone of respect for others' ideas and opinions.

Often critics of homeschooling themselves don't feel qualified to teach their own children. They may easily project that perceived lack onto other families without even thinking about it. Your critic may quite sincerely question whether you are qualified to teach your children based on *their* lacks rather than yours.

Critics are often people who are uneasy with the unfamiliar. They may suffer from a vague anxiety that the children will somehow suffer some unknown and irreparable harm. Or they may be caught up in the pervasive intergenerational perpetuation of misinformation: it was good enough for me, so it's good enough for you. ...

Second, your decision to educate your children may be thought of as snobbish or elitist. It may be seen as a judgment of other people's decisions to send their children to school. People who criticize homeschooling may feel they must defend their personal beliefs about education and schooling.

Third, almost everyone in our culture sees "education" and "schooling" as the same. Thus, your decision to keep your children out of school may be viewed, consciously or otherwise, as a decision to deprive your children of "education." Homeschoolers have the added responsibility to educate the community that homeschooling is an acceptable alternative to public or private schooling.

With these points in mind, the following tips and strategies may be useful when speaking with those who criticize homeschooling.

• You have a philosophy of learning that is uniquely yours. Share it! Let people know that you know what you are doing. Help them realize that you did not arrive at your decision to homeschool lightly.

• While anyone *can* homeschool, not everyone will or should choose to homeschool. Not everyone can make that kind of commitment, and they should not feel guilty about their choice to school their children outside the home.

• Save your worries, fears, and complaints about homeschooling for support group meetings. Most critics of homeschooling will consider your complaints to be a sign that homeschooling does not work. Their fears that you may ruin your children seem to be validated when you complain. Your casual complaint about a minor frustration invites an extra measure of criticism.

• Actively present a positive image in the community. You don't have to go on television or be constantly in public to show the world how great homeschooling is for your family. When shopping with the kids at 10:00 Monday morning, chat with the clerks about today's cooking project, or field trip, or whatever, before they even get a chance to ask why the kids aren't in school today. If they do ask, you can answer, "My children learn at home, and we have a flexible schedule."

• Speak of what you want for your children, not what you are avoiding. Almost everyone can agree that one-on-one instruction is a good thing. Don't complain that public classrooms are too crowded and the children waste their time while compelled to be there – just a tad negative, right? You can praise the advantages of one-on-one instruction without condemning anyone else's choices.

• Speak occasionally of the personal rewards you gain from homeschooling your children. "I homeschool my children because I love to spend time with them." "I have always wanted to study science, and here is my chance!" Such comments generate, if not acceptance, and sometimes even envy, at least some sense of, "Oh, well, to each his own."

• Many critics of homeschooling believe that the positive aspects of school socialization outweigh the negative aspects. Don't argue, and listen to the opinion. Then share a little bit about your children's friendships, their group activities through church, community, homeschool groups, Scouts, 4-H, etc. Reassure concerned individuals that you have given the socialization issue some thought, too, and are making sure your children connect with the outside world. Recently I responded to a store clerk's concern, "But what about socialization?" I simply said, "I agree with you, the socialization issue is very important. Homeschoolers are very concerned about socializing their children. Participation in community and homeschool groups gives the children many opportunities to make friends and to learn how to work in a group. These days we have more social opportunities than we can take advantage of."

• Finally, and above all, be respectful of the rights of others to have opinions that are different from yours. Isn't that what we want for ourselves? Homeschoolers want the right to choose their own way, without being judged, condemned, or discriminated against. Sometimes the best we can hope for is to agree to disagree. ◆

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Challenges & Concerns

Rethinking Algebra Anxiety

Barbara Kay writes from England:

In England, or at least in my own experience, algebra is a not-very-important part of mathematics. I went to a "good" secondary school and presumably was taught the normal level of mathematics here, enough for me to gain the General Certificate of Education qualification in maths. I remember algebra as a quite interesting puzzle: find the hidden number.

So I, and others here, are intrigued by the moral terror algebra has for Americans. Do Americans have to learn algebra to a much higher level in school than the English? If so, to what end? Are the British missing something by not studying algebra in depth? How can we function without it? Or is it the same with you and with us – quadratic equations and things?

Perhaps in America they introduce algebra in schools as some sort of rite of passage, to show you have reached a certain age or level. Maybe it is a "well-known fact" that algebra is hard and that even people who can manage to understand it have only gotten there with a struggle. Certainly it is very abstract; it's much easier to understand apples and oranges or bags of sweets than x and y.

I don't know the answers to my questions about the level at which Algebra is taught in America. What I notice is the number of times it is mentioned in GWS, and with what anxiety or relief. I don't see, for example, history mentioned in this way, or even geometry or grammar. It is as if there is an unspoken agreement that a) algebra is horrendous and b) unschooling is all very well, but when it comes to *algebra*, how on earth are we going to cope?

Perhaps it's the one thing people have got stuck at. Basic mathematics – counting, measuring, weighing, calculating comes in everyday life, and quite honestly that's as far as it goes for most adults. However, algebra is different, it appears. Far more abstracted from the real world, perhaps you would never come across its formal guise unless you were looking for it. It seems to me that the important part of algebra is the development of logical thinking, which can be developed in a large number of other ways too.

It has occurred to me that perhaps you have to be able to achieve a level of algebraic competence to get a good SAT result. Even so, it does seem strange that I never read of anxiety about other clear-cut, right-or-wrong subjects like trigonometry. So perhaps it has never occurred to Americans that algebra is only algebra.

[SS:] I replied:

What's so funny and delightful about your questions is that you show so clearly the value of seeing one's own culture and its assumptions through the eyes of someone outside that culture. Your confusion – the fact that it's not obvious to you why the parents in GWS would be so anxious about algebra – and all your guesses about why that should be highlight some really important things. So even though I'm going to try to answer *your* questions, I think you've really done *American* readers a service rather than the other way around.

Though I don't know what British kids study in algebra classes, I'm almost certain the issue is not that American schools teach it to a much more advanced degree. Yes, some algebra comes up on the SAT, and yes, algebra is in fact useful or even necessary for some real work in the world, like architecture and construction and some parts of statistics or economics, for example. But I think your guess that comes closest to the source of people's anxiety is the one about algebra as a rite of passage. Algebra is commonly taught in ninth grade here, the first year of high school, and I think it's come to symbolize that rite of passage and also – this is the real crux of it – it's come to be used, or viewed, as a sorting mechanism, separating the college-bound or academically tracked kids from the others.

What's interesting to me is the way in which this is so often true for homeschoolers as well. I find that for many homeschoolers, doing algebra symbolizes "keeping up with the school kids" and by extension "keeping one's hand in the conventional pie." I see long-time homeschooling kids feeling anxious if they aren't yet studying algebra (especially if their friends in school are studying it and go so far as to quiz them on it – a girl in *A Sense of Self* describes a scene like this).

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Likewise, for kids who begin homeschooling as teenagers, so often they'll brainstorm all sorts of interesting ways to do various things, and then, in that mix, there's a desire to do algebra out of a textbook so as not to have veered from school's course too widely. There's a sense that if you find a way to keep up with algebra, you're keeping options open – which in a sense you are, given the way it marks someone as college bound. But the option being kept open isn't usually thought of as "architecture" or any of those other activities and occupations for which algebra *is* truly necessary. As well, a fair amount of the time, a new homeschooler will say to me, "My mother (or father) wants to know that I'm doing algebra." It's a matter of reassurance.

As you say, some people see algebra as a fun puzzle, and there are many fun, challenging, and puzzling things to enjoy in this world, but crossword or jigsaw puzzles don't generate algebra's level of anxiety. Nor, even, do other skills which are needed for or helpful in various occupations. So I think your perspective, your ability to wonder at something that many people here are too inside the situation to see, will be much appreciated.

Court Orders Children to School

Lynette Tarkington of Massachusetts writes:

After prolonged divorce litigation, the courts ordered my 11-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter to go to school this fall. This decision was made ten days before the first day of school in a motions hearing with no evidence other than the court-appointed guardian's report and the evidence produced by the lawyers on both sides. I've been shocked by the prejudice I encountered because I dared to be different, because I dared to have some clear values and beliefs about family and parenting, because I've researched and made thoughtful decisions regarding healthcare and vaccinations and becaues I have a warm, intimate, and open relationship with my children where issues are dealt with honestly and openly.

I do not know what I would have done without my homeschooling community as I went through this crisis. First of all, this community is the one place in which I do have a clear sense of belonging. For two weeks after I received the court decision, I woke up crying every morning and sobbed every time I talked about it. There was a handful of people who stayed in touch with me and listened to my crying; it was what I needed to do and I couldn't do it alone. These people were like a healing balm to me. Then there were the people who came and had breakfast with me, after my children started school, because I couldn't stand having it alone. Breakfast had always been a time when my children and I would sit down together and plan our day.

The homeschooling community had felt like my tribe, and one of my fears was that I would be banished from the tribe once my children were in school. This of course has not happened, and in fact I still teach some classes to homeschoolers and we still do activities with homeschoolers.

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Having had the school decision thrust on me, I decided that I had to do everything I could to make it as easy as possible for my children. I visited the classrooms, met with their teachers several times, explained my children's previous learning experience and style and expressed my reservations about school learning for them. In both cases, the teachers were very understanding, but the truth is that they have over 20 children and families to deal with, so one family's needs, while important, cannot be catered to. How can anyone seriously believe that this situation is better for a child than the one-to-one attention and nurturing they receive in a homeschooling situation?

My son used to spend all day asking questions and having them answered. As a result, he has a wealth of knowledge that he would not have had if he had been in school all along, because no classroom teacher can possibly fill this role of answering one child's questions all day. His questions now go unanswered. Both my children loved math learning and consequently we spent a lot of time doing math; they were both well above their grade levels because they had the freedom to go as far as they wanted with math. They no longer have an interest in doing the many math games and activities that they used to love. They are too tired at the end of the day for anything other than snacking and vegging out. My son came home the other day and said, "You know, Mum, now that I'm in school there's no time to just sit and be bored." All he wanted to do at that particular moment was sit and do nothing. It is hard for him, after being a free spirit, to be confined to one room and one seat for six hours each day without being able to move around at will or let his mind wander or get a snack or ask a question. Isn't it hard for any child? My question is how have we as a society come to accept this state of things for our children so unquestionably? I am shocked that there are no other parents in school (except two who were already friends of mine and have been lifesavers) who share my concerns over homework, grading, testing, and other issues. When, in a curriculum meeting, I asked a question about testing, I was shot down because, I was told, we have to prepare our children for the real world. I'm trying to remember a time since school that I have been tested. I can't think of any. Why do we so readily believe these lies?

I have some theories about this. One is that parents feel so guilty about giving up their children to daycare, preschool, and other institutions that they have to believe school is good and fight for a "better education." They get caught up in the drive to make things good for their children by placing higher and higher expectations on schools, failing to see that what their children really need is them and family life.

The reason the guardian recommended that my children go to school was based solely on some reading and spelling tests he did on my son which showed him to be below grade level. The guardian said my son needed the special services that public school would provide. However, both my children are performing well in school and neither of them require special services. They are smart and confident children and I am very proud of them for the way they have handled a very difficult situation.

We look forward to being able to homeschool again. I believe we will some time get back to it; I just don't know when. Meanwhile, I am enjoying working with other homeschoolers and watching this exciting grassroots movement grow.

Getting Permission to Take Community College Class

Ronder Thomas Young (GA) writes:

William, who turned 16 this summer, has a keen interest in Japanese art, mythology and literature, which led, naturally, to an interest in studying the Japanese language. He could have studied Japanese independently, but he thought that the support of a class would be useful. Although he could have been admitted to a local private college which is very open to homeschoolers, a local community college with a Japanese program was more convenient, both financially and geographically.

I assumed, as William was a high school student, that I should contact the joint enrollment office. His test scores were well above what they required, and we had well-documented narrative and quantitative transcripts. I called the director about joint enrollment, but was told that she couldn't even look at our transcripts unless they came from an institution. She was very nice, but bound by state regulations.

At first I just wrote them off. If William's accomplishments and education had not been so well-documented, I might have gone to someone or someplace and paid them to redo his transcript and send it in, thus making it "official," but that seemed too much of a waste of time and money to us. After he'd already successfully investigated other alternatives, however, I came at the community college from a different angle, more for my own curiosity than anything else.

In a letter, I listed what William did have: concrete accomplishments, an SAT score well above their requirement and a comprehensive interest in Japanese culture. I admitted what he did not have: an "official" high school transcript. I said that I had been told this barred him from applying for joint enrollment status at the college. Was there any way, I asked, that he might specifically take Elementary Japanese without joint enrollment status? Would an interview with the instructor help? Could he audit the course? William was interested only in studying and learning the language – not particularly in credit and certainly not in grades. Even a provisional acceptance, limiting him to that one Japanese class at first, would be acceptable, as Japanese was all that he wanted to take right now. I sent this letter along with letters of recommendation from a couple of William's art teachers to the same woman with whom I'd had the disappointing conversation earlier.

This specific request was successful. The woman this time sent my letter along to the Director of Admissions for special consideration. It actually seemed more important to her than us – by this time we'd explored other alternatives – that William be accepted. "The onus is on us," she said,"to give deserving students the opportunity to study."

William is now enrolled in Elementary Japanese. If he receives at least a grade of "C" in the class, he is then free to take whatever courses he wants as a full-blown joint enrollment student at the college. It was an important reminder to me that the specificity with which we pursue our independent study should not change merely because we're dealing with institutions. What William wanted to do was not to be admitted into the joint enrollment program; he wanted to study Japanese.

And Martha Spice of Maryland writes with some thoughts about community colleges:

In our experience, local community colleges are a wonderful resource. The college in our area is very accessible to homeschoolers. There is an academic skills assessment that applicants take; it is for placement only. If it shows that applicants are not ready for 100-level courses, remedial courses are available. The college itself is a very friendly place, having many of the advantages of a small, private college without the price tag. Additionally, the credits transfer well to a four-year institution. One other advantage is that the college has an open enrollment policy, which results in a varied age group ranging from unusually young students to senior citizens.

One of my four children graduated from our community college in 1995 and transferred to a university where he is now completing his senior year, and two of my children are currently enrolled at the community college. The campus has truly come to seem like a second home to us. In fact, once a week, due to driving arrangements, I homeschool my youngest child in the college library while his brother is in class.

One hint: we have discovered that there are advantages to starting during the summer semester. There are fewer students enrolled then and it's a good time for new students to get used to the campus. That way, they have already made their adjustment by September when enrollment is higher and the campus is busier. ◆

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The Power of Mindful Learning

Interview with Ellen Langer

Ellen Langer's new book challenges some of the most accepted notions about learning – "practice makes perfect," "wrong answers are bad," and many others. She praises doubt and uncertainty, thinks people have fun when they're learning something new, and thinks that kids with attention-deficit aren't distracted – they're just paying attention to something else. Sound like just the sort of thinker GWS readers would want to hear from? We thought so!

Susannah Sheffer: How do you define "mindful learning"?

Ellen Langer: Mindful learning is learning that keeps you sensitive to context and aware of the way information keeps changing. People are usually taught to hold things still in their minds, when in fact things are always changing.

An example I often give is that when I was in school, I was tested on the three reasons for the Civil War. Well, there are no *people* in that idea. It's given to you as *the three reasons*, as though we all agree that these are the three reasons. But if we said, "The three reasons for the Civil War, from the perspective of _____," and then we finished that sentence by mentioning a particular person or group, it's clear that it might also be different from somebody else's perspective, so that gives you something to actively think about. You can see that with each new person you think of, the answer might change, so the information is constantly changing.

What you're doing when you're mindful is you're actively noticing things. You're drawing distinctions, and in so doing, you're aware that things are different from different perspectives. You realize that you don't know, and because you don't know, you stay tuned in. But most of the things we're taught in school lead us to freeze our understanding, and that gets us into trouble.

SS: Of course, some children get in trouble in school *for* actively thinking. They're the ones who are saying, "Well, that could be true in that instance but not in this other instance, so how can I write 'true' or 'false' in the blank?" but the test is only calling for the simple answer. So often, learning how to play the school game means learning *not* to think of all the variables and different perspectives.

EL: I remember, I was such a good student that I'd often be able to give an answer without even *hearing* the question! School is, I think, largely an experience of teaching people to conform to society's norms – which would be OK if it were put out there as such. Then people would realize that to get other sorts of education, they might want to do other things. And also, they might question whether they wanted to improve society, because you're not going to make any attempts to improve it if you're not aware that you're subtly learning to be just like everybody else in it.

SS: Yes, it's interesting to think what would happen if certain things about school were just stated outright.

EL: Also, teachers teach the way they were taught, so the system just perpetuates itself. But it's interesting: if we focus on mindful learning, I think people can be less afraid of doing something different, because they don't have to worry about not doing something well or not knowing the answer. If you realize that not knowing is OK, then teachers can encourage students to ask questions without worrying that they themselves don't know the answers. To guess at something suggests that there are ways of *coming to know*, and I think that's what information should be seen as – not as something static, but as something in progress.

SS: And that feels very different from the kind of bluffing that a student does on an exam when she doesn't know the answer but knows that one precise answer is expected. One of the accepted notions you challenge in your work is the idea of right and wrong answers, and I think homeschoolers often challenge this too. What's the alternative, do you think?

EL: Wrong answers are correct in some contexts. The person who stated the wrong answer stated it because of some way they put the information together that made sense to them. You want to understand how they came to that answer, which you're not going to do if you just dismiss it as wrong.

When I say there are no right answers, I don't mean we can't arbitrarily define a situation for which there will be a right answer. But there's no answer that will be correct across all contexts. So people say to me, but 1 + 1 is 2. And I say, no, 1 + 1 is only 2 in certain number systems. And if you take one piece of gum and add it to another piece of gum, you don't have two pieces of gum, you have one bigger piece. So many of the truths that we hold to be self-evident are truths that exist on a level of abstraction, but as soon as you bring them down to the level of experience, you see that there's something cock-eyed here.

SS: What might a parent do if a child makes a statement about the world that seems obviously false to the parent?

EL: You say, "Johnny, how did you come to that?" Or – and this can be fun – you can try to come up with guesses about why he said it, guesses about how he might be seeing things. You can ask yourself, "Is there any context in which that answer would

make sense? Is there any situation in which it would be true?"

SS: I think of what John Holt said about children forming hypotheses as they make sense of the world. He said that children do adjust their hypotheses as they gain more information or take more variables into account. Holt often gave the Piagetian example of a child who says, "Trees make the wind blow," and then when he gets to a place where there are no trees and the wind still blows, he adjusts that hypothesis him-self; it's not necessary for someone to say "that's wrong" all the time.

EL: Sure, and it's also fun to see the way in which that child's comment is *true*. If there's no object, there's no way of detecting that there's wind. Something has to move for us to detect the wind; that's what we mean by "blow." So in that sense, the wind's blowing does depend on the trees.

SS: What's neat is that there's so much more pleasure in this way of looking at things.

EL: Yes. You realize that it's fun to generate answers, to think about things. People have the notion that learning is hard, but here we are saying how much fun it can be when you remove the evaluative component. If you think about what people find fun, whether it's riding their bike or listening to a comedian, the only way it's fun is if it involves noticing something new. People don't do a crossword puzzle a second time, when they know all the answers; it's not as much fun that way, because there's no uncertainty. What they like is the uncertainty and the opportunity to notice something new; that's exciting. So it's bizarre to me that we take this engaging, energy-begetting experience – learning – and basically destroy it for people.

SS: You know, it seems to me that there's one situation in which it *isn't* true that people consider "fun" synonymous with learning something new. You talk in the book about people making unnecessary distinctions between work and play, and I think that when people do that – when they have the idea that work is difficult and disagreeable but has to be done – then they're more likely to come home at the end of the day and want their "fun" to be rather numbing and mindless, as a way of escaping.

EL: When those people come home, what they're saying is that they want to do something different from what they've done at work. They may think of it as: at work I do all sorts of important things and I think hard, so now I don't want to think. But in fact, they're *not* thinking at work. And at home, when they say they want to turn it off, they're not actually turning off their mindfulness. They're turning off some of the evaluative notion that comes with work. What's most interesting to me is that I see people play in ways that actually involve the same sorts of activities as their work. Just by calling it "play," they approach it differently. When we tell people they have to delay gratification, or we say "no pain, no gain," we're reinforcing the idea that some things are just awful, rather than that you can affect things by how you see them.

SS: That's so similar to the confusions people have about homeschoolers and all the comments people make about, "Well, the real world is full of disagreeable hard work." And when homeschoolers say something like, "I enjoy learning," they don't usually mean "I'm an odd sort of person who actually enjoys drudgery." They mean, "I'm doing it totally differently."

EL: It's a well-kept secret that those of us who do what we do well *enjoy* what we do, or we wouldn't do it. Doesn't it sound heroic to think that we might be staying up late doing things we hate, because we're so self-disciplined and we've learned to delay gratification? It doesn't sound as heroic to say you stayed up late doing something that you thought was fun.

SS: I don't think babies think, "OK, I've got to put my nose to the grindstone here and discipline myself to practice walking." They do everything fully, they throw themselves in. They have the goal, but they're fully

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engaged in the process too. And in some ways I think homeschoolers who are much older than babies learn that way too, throwing themselves in to whatever engages them. But sometimes they worry because outsiders put so much emphasis on preparation, on doing one thing now so you'll be prepared for something else later. So I have a question I can't quite articulate, which is something like, if you throw yourself into your current life, to whatever engages you, do you think that will eventually lead to other things or make other things possible?

EL: I think in a way you're talking about the fears people have that if they're enjoying doing something that other people don't have a lot of respect for, will they get stuck? To me, there's almost no activity to which one could attend that couldn't reveal something which could become fascinating and worthwhile. Suppose, while you want me to be attending to something else, I see an ant crawling across the floor. Maybe in watching that ant I notice something about locomotion, or about the psychology of how ants behave. There are all sorts of things which, if you don't look, you won't see. That doesn't mean if you do look you will see, but the point is that if you really are looking with attention, it won't be a waste of time. And the very act of being engaged is exciting to a person. You feel alive, and in that alive state you're going to notice and be open to lots of possibilities.

SS: You say, "if you're looking with attention," which makes me think of your challenge, in your book, to the way we usually think about "paying attention."

EL: We think that if someone's not paying attention, it means that they're distracted rather than, as I put it, "otherwise attracted." Where do we want to assign the cause for the individual's behavior? If a child isn't paying attention, does that always mean there's something wrong with the child? The child may not be engaging the material in the lecture, but maybe he's watching the ant or looking out the window. Which should he do? Well, for me, all of life is manifested in almost everything, so if I see you studying that tray over there, I can see physics in that, I can see the history of people, I can see all kinds of things that tell me you're spending you're time in a worthwhile way. If I believed that only what I'm saying is important, then it would be irresponsible of me to let you look at that tray. So when people tell these children to pay attention, they have a view of the world that says the information that's being given is important and the child is spending his time doing something unimportant.

SS: And about your comment in the book that paying attention doesn't have to mean focusing on only one thing at a time, I think of a workshop I gave at our conference this summer. Some of the teenagers there were drawing or writing (I couldn't tell) during the talk, and afterwards, one of them came up to me and said she wanted to be sure I knew that they weren't being rude. "Drawing helps me to listen better," she said, making it clear that she *was* paying attention to what I was saying, too. Why do you think we're obsessed in this culture with the idea that people, and kids in particular, need to do one thing at a time or they're not really focusing?

EL: Well, I think we were brought up to believe that that's what focusing is, like focusing a camera. We think attention means holding still. I have an image of a 16-year-old boy who's labeled ADD, and he's talking on the telephone, making a peanut butter sandwich, changing the channel, doing 49 things at once, each of which couldn't be done without attention. I think "attention deficit" usually means "you're not paying attention to what I want you to pay attention to." I also think we *can* get people to pay attention to what we want them to attend to, and the way to do that is to introduce uncertainty about it. If people think they already know, they won't pay attention.

SS: Let's also talk about your challenge to the idea that rote memorization is necessary, because that's such a classic one for homeschoolers, another one that they question but

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also sometimes worry about.

EL: Typically, our idea is that you teach someone how to do something – you teach them *the* way to do it, not *a* way – and you encourage them to do it over and over until they don't have to think about it anymore. If I change those words to, "just keep doing it until you can do it mindlessly," you realize, wait a minute, why do it if you're not going to be there? The other thing is that when you're first learning a task, if you learn a set of steps mindlessly, you'll freeze your understanding at a time when you know the *least* about the activity. At the beginning, you don't know how you're going to need to vary this, that, or the other thing. But if you look at people who are experts at what they do, you realize that they go back and reshuffle the deck. They do "the basics" differently whenever they need to. If people learn mindfully, they'll adjust what they've learned as they go along; they'll be sensitive to context.

SS: I'm laughing as I think about young people asking me questions about writing. I tend to give a long answer about how it depends on this and that. I say, "If it's like this, I often do that, but if it's this other way, I do something different." But I do think that even if that makes the answers long-winded, they're also truer or, as you'd say, more mindful.

EL: Of course, if a person has been led to believe that there *are* precise right and wrong answers and they just have to get the basics down, and you tell them, "But this, but that," they get annoyed and threatened.

SS: Has anyone ever said to you that what you're saying might be difficult or unsettling for people, because you're introducing uncertainty where before there was stability?

EL: I think that the more authoritarian the individual, the more threatening these ideas will be. Not-knowing is only threatening when you add the belief that you *should* know.

Sometimes, when I say you should be mindful all the time, people think I'm saying that you should be mindful of *everything*. But of course you can't think of everything at the same moment. And even if I look at a cup and think, "This is an object that could be used as a cup" – in other words, even if I recognize that it could be used as something else – I can function perfectly well just using it as a cup. I don't have to spend the time thinking of all the other things that cup could be. But the point is that if I realize I *can* see it in other ways, then I can draw upon those other ways should I need them or want them.

SS: Before we wrap this up, I want to ask you – if you know – how you've been able to question so many of these accepted ideas about how people learn.

EL: I'm not sure. People have always said to me, "Don't you ever stop thinking?" I was also lucky enough to have talents that didn't fit a simple stereotype. So with one group, there would be certain rules of decorum, and then I'd be with the other kids, and they'd have their rules, which didn't match the other group's. I got to see that absolute rules weren't so absolute after all. Some of us have come to this kind of thinking fortuitously. Now it may be time I hope to teach people quite intentionally how to engage in mindful learning.

I think that in general, if things don't work out, people have three ways of thinking about why. One is, "I'm just no good." That's really too bad, when people conclude that. The second explanation is that these things just happen by chance. The third is, "There's got to be some other way of thinking about this." And that third explanation is the one that leads to possibilities because it allows you to realize that nothing is fixed and that you can change things by changing how you see them.

SS: It's interesting that you just described, in a sense, the process people often go through in deciding to homeschool. First they think, there must be something wrong with me (or my child). Then they think, well, these things happen. But if they move on to the thought that there must be another way to see this, it leads to all kinds of possibilities, just as you described.◆

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How Homeschooling Becomes the Kids' Own Choice

When young people turn to homeschooling after spending years in school, it's pretty clear that they've made the decision for themselves. But for those who have been homeschooling since they were very young, the original decision was, at least in some sense, the parents'. As these kids grow, they often become aware that homeschooling *is* a choice and then re-make that choice for themselves in some way. We asked several long-time homeschoolers to reflect on this process.

A Turning Point at age 12

From Diana Deaver (NV):

I've always known that homeschooling was my family's choice. I couldn't homeschool without my parents' encouragement, and they (of course) couldn't homeschool without me. I went to kindergarten and first grade, but I've homeschooled since then. I'm a sophomore this year, which means I've been out of school for nine years. I think that's kind of cool, since a lot of adults can't even say they've been out of school that long.

I don't remember making the decision to homeschool. My parents say I cried every day after school and begged all summer for them not to make me go back. I do remember making up a lot of stories after school so my parents wouldn't make me return the next day. One story that sticks in my mind is a time I fell off the swing and I told my parents someone had shoved me over. At 7 years old, I didn't know how to tell them that I was miserable. The only thing I knew how to describe was physical pain.

Up until I was about 12, the homeschooling decision was basically my parents'. I took homeschooling for granted. I knew it was the path my family had chosen, and I never really gave it a second thought. I didn't even feel that there was any other way I could go about my education.

But for the last three or four years, I have been thinking a lot about my (our) choice to homeschool. I've realized that after I reached the "wonderful" high school years, homeschooling has been basically my decision. My parents have said they would like me to continue homeschooling, but they're not going to tie me to the kitchen table if my dream is to take a ride on the big yellow bus.

For the last two years, I've been having a continual struggle with myself over whether to go to school. Sometimes I feel like I'm tired of missing all the social stuff I hear I'm missing. So far I haven't been able to put my finger on quite what I'm missing, though, since every school activity I've been to (dances, football games, etc.) has ended in catastrophe, with a large group of people flaunting their immaturity, but I'm sure I'm missing *something*. But enough sarcasm. In all seriousness, I don't think I ever will go back to school. In the long run, my freedom is more important than spending my next few years with a bunch of 16-year-olds going on 5. And since the decision is now mine, I keep putting it off. Last year it was, "Whoops, the year's half over. I'll wait till next year." This year it's, "How will I find enough time to go to school?" And I already have the next two years' excuses planned: "I'm going to graduate soon. Why go and get settled in, just in time to graduate?" So I guess without realizing it, I've made the decision.

Taking Ownership of Your Education

From Scott Pryor of Virginia:

I started homeschooling when I was 7 years old. After my two tortuous years at the local elementary school, my parents knew there must be some alternative (probably as much for the sake of their sanity as for mine!). My mother approached me in the car one summer day with the idea of homeschooling. I was willing to try something new, so we ventured out into the wide world of homeschooling that fall. It is interesting how simple the transition is in my memory: My mother asked, "Do you want to give homeschooling a try?" I answered yes and I did not see the inside of a school building for another seven years. I am sure there is a great deal more to the story from my parents' perspective. Even though I was asked for my input on the matter, I consider the original decision to homeschool to be largely that of my parents.

Homeschooling quickly became, in my mind, the way my family did school (both my younger sister and brother homeschooled from the beginning of their "formal education" years). Public school was somewhat of a distant world to me. Even though I had previous experience in it, I was fully engulfed in the many false starts, re-evaluations, and progress that were taking place as my family learned how to homeschool. I had a few friends who went to school, but most were homeschooled. Some of my homeschooled friends had siblings who were in school. I was content to know that public school was a path that some

families chose while others chose homeschooling.

When I was 10 my family moved. We got involved with the local homeschool group, but most of the friends I made attended public school. It was during the sixth and seventh grades that I first remember considering returning to public school, due, in large part, to the many friends I had there. Another important reason for my interest was plain curiosity. I looked into the possibility of visiting the local middle school for a day, but my interest never went further than that.

I have been blessed with parents who respect my thoughts and needs and place a great deal of trust in me. They always tell me how they feel about any thoughts I have or choices I must make, but ultimately, the decision is mine and they will back me one hundred percent. Looking back over the years, I see a gradual shift in roles and responsibility between my parents and me. As I was given more and more say in how I structured my daily activities and in what areas I wanted to spend time exploring, I began to realize that my education was not something someone was forcing on to me but something that was my own to hold, cherish, and nurture. This realization did not necessarily change the way I was doing things, but rather, it made me appreciate the way in which I was able to do things – learn without deadlines, tests, or stale classrooms. What blossomed out of this new appreciation was only an intensified genuine desire to learn at my own pace beneath the great sky.

As high school approached, the question rose again in my mind – do I continue to homeschool? With the possibility of college looming in the distance, I was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of building up a college-worthy list of studies and activities on my own. I don't know where this intimidation came from. Perhaps it shows the thoroughness through which institutional standards and expectations permeate our daily lives, even if we have no direct contact with them – as I didn't for seven years.

This intimidation, however, was by far not the only reason I was interested in attending public school. As with my prior interest, curiosity played a major role. And then there was the part of me that needed a sort of reassurance that I was on the same academic plane as my peers.

In the end, I attended high school for ninth and tenth grades. In ninth grade I was the perfect student – completely focused on school and excited to be there. I spent my tenth grade year, however, not wanting to be in school. In looking back, though, I am very thankful for my two years at school. I learned a great deal about myself and the ways I learn best. If anything, school only intensified the realization that homeschooling was a choice – my choice!

I decided to rise out of institutionalized education for the remainder of my high school years. I owe my thanks to Grace Llewellyn's *Teenage Liberation Handbook* that my mom handed to me two weeks before my freshman year summer break ended. (I can envision those of you who had the same experience with Grace's book smiling and nodding your head!) The decision to leave school was a sort of a final leg in the shift in roles between my parents and me that I spoke of earlier. I had complete control over the things I did, places I went, and time I spent. My parents gave me their full support and offered their assistance if I should want it. I view the past two years as the beginning of my educational and spiritual journey that will last my whole life.

Realizing that homeschooling was a choice also, and more importantly, made me realize that *education* was a choice. *I* am the only person who can really challenge *me* to grow. Spending years in school does not automatically mean that you learn. Homeschooling does not automatically mean that you learn either. With homeschooling, however, there is almost always a choice involved. Unfortunately, that is not the case with public school. I believe it is precisely this choice all homeschoolers eventually make or come to realize that leads to ownership of our education, and, consequently, a beautiful garden of self-confidence, knowledge, and curiosity.

Never Thought He Should Go

From Jeremy Young (AZ):

From the time I was very young, I knew that other people went to school, but I never thought that I should go. It just never interested me. I've never been a big people person, never been interested in knowing a lot of other kids, so I learned about school mainly from hearing my parents talk about it or seeing kids in commercials going to school or reading about it in books. But it seemed like there was no reason for me to go. I have an inborn aversion to change, which is driven by this logic: since I like my life the way it is, I want to stay happy by changing as little of it as I can. I like homeschooling and I like my life with homeschooling, so there's no real reason to stop what I know and go to school, with which I have no experience. I've felt pretty much this way my whole life.

I've never really thought much about why I'm homeschooling; however, when I think about it, I see that there are several important reasons that my life would not be as good without homeschooling. First and most important, I care very much about my parents and want to spend as much time as possible with them. They are my best friends. Some people would say this is bad, that I should be spending more time with people my own age and not care about my parents, but I disagree hotly with them and am proud to feel the way I do.

The other reason I'm glad I'm not in school has to do with peer pressure. I've had a few short encounters with it, ones in which I've been largely disliked for being "so uncool." I've been whispered about because "he doesn't know what [blank] means" (as if it mattered in the scheme of things if I knew what [blank] means). I've even been told that I "think girls are satanic" just because I said that I won't date until age 18. I lived through two weeks of this and it almost broke my individuality; imagine five years with it! Homeschooling has spared me this happening.

Even though I know my parents prefer homeschooling, and even though going to school has never interested me, if I really wanted to go to school, I know my parents would let me. So I guess that in that

sense, homeschooling is my choice. Now that I've thought about it, I'm even happier that I'm homeschooling and I hope I continue to do it all of the rest of my school years.

Gaining Conviction about the Choice

From Dillon Wright FitzGerald (PA):

My homeschooling never started out as a program. My family life was simply centered around the home: my parents made wooden toys, and we had a shop in the front of our house in east Baltimore. To them, it seemed natural that my brother and I should stay at home. My life was very much an "unschoolish" life; I alone seemed to get "schoolish" ideas early on. For example, when I decided I wanted to learn how to read, I made my own flash cards: strips of cardboard with a drawing on one side and the word on the other. I made a whole box of them. I got my mother to teach me the alphabet on our big chalkboard (which we usually would draw elaborate pictures on).

But I think these were the only times I desired something like school. I remember feeling distinctly grateful, one day when I was 8, sitting at the top of our three-story house and watching the students at the parochial school across the street filing in the door in their dark dresses. I felt so happy that I didn't have to do that. I would listen to my friends who went to school talk about their homework, their teachers, their classes, but interestingly enough, I never felt impelled to join them. My parents felt strongly that we should be homeschooled, but they left the choice to go on or not up to us.

When I was 10, we moved to rural Pennsylvania, and my homeschooling became much more bumpy. The law now required that we structure our education, more than even I wanted to: we had to keep a daily log, submit our yearly educational objectives, and be evaluated by a certified teacher. It was a little overwhelming. I suddenly felt like I had done "nothing" back in Baltimore, and I felt awfully guilty. I remember my mother asking me if I wanted to go to school during this period. But I didn't want to. The changes of the move were great enough; I didn't want my life to change completely. So the structure of my homeschooling increased for a few years and went through growing pains. Still, I never had any desire to go to school. I watched the bus pass our house every day, but without envy, just a little hope that what I was doing was important too.

Still, I consider this to be prior to the time when I really believed in what I was doing. Not having too many homeschooled friends (three to whom I was closest returned to school in the space of two years), I sometimes felt like I had little support. Then I discovered Grace Llewellyn's *Teenage Liberation Handbook* when I was 13. Although it was written with the subtitle "How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education," I didn't need to learn how to do the first part, just verify that I already had the last two. This book inspired me in so many ways. Although I was out of school already, I had never made the decision to get out, and therefore I often completely took my freedom for granted. I discovered my mission statement in Llewellyn's words, and when the book was still new in my hands I was constantly underlining passages and reading aloud to my mother. This book renewed my faith in my sort of life. It also gave me a new zest for learning everything I could in the most delicious ways possible. I've lent it to some adults who are curious about the roots of my education. And I've found I can talk with more conviction about what I do – all I had needed was a little outside support, and I got it in an exciting package.

Somewhere along the line, after I read this book, I almost felt that I had made the decision to homeschool, myself, because I believed so strongly in it now. Before, I had always thought that I might not homeschool my own kids, if I had any. But now I don't see how I could send them to school. How could I, with the knowledge that I have? All I know is, I am happy where I am now, at home – I feel that even if my resources are at times limited, I am happy, and I feel healthy. I think that is the most important thing about education; it shouldn't feel like the treatment plan of a disease. It should be natural, self-motivated, a journey mapped out by each individual and worth undertaking.

I have very happy memories of my childhood. The guilt is long gone – how could I feel guilty about a time that I remember was such a good time? Sometimes our parents need to make choices for us, radical ones that make us different from others (and hopefully for our own good). I feel very lucky; I haven't been brainwashed into believing that my parents' choice was the right one. Rather, I have come to that belief on my own, through my own observation and my own feelings. I know that it was right for me.

Knew Himself Well Enough to Know What Was Right

From James Deaver (NY):

I can't remember a time when I ever wanted to go to school. My older sister Diana started homeschooling before I was school-age, so I knew about homeschooling. So I guess this was my choice and it has not changed over time.

I think one of the reasons I didn't want to go to school was because Diana hated it and had a hard time there. I heard about her troubles through family discussions. But there are other reasons I didn't want to go, too. One was because of how much time I would be away from home. I'm a person who never really liked being away from home. I remember a trip with Diana when I was 8. We flew alone to New Mexico to stay with our grandparents for a week. I hated it because I missed the rest of my family, especially my brother John who I spent most of my time with. Now that I am 12, I do Boy Scout campouts away from home and I feel fine. Next summer I hope to go to a Boy Scout camp that will mean I'll be away from home for a week, and I'm looking forward to it. Also, this summer Diana went to Not-Back-to-School-Camp in Oregon and I hope to go with her next summer. I guess I just needed to be older to ease into being away.

Another reason I never wanted to go to school was that I'm different from most kids. I'm a vegetarian and have long hair, and in school I think I would get teased. It doesn't happen in Scouts because it's a different environment from school and the kids don't have to be there. But the kids in school are forced to be there and they're not enjoying it so they tend to be meaner. Where we used to live, there were kids in the neighborhood who were mean and that kind of gave me a taste of what it was like.

I also get distracted easily at times and I think in school it would be worse. So I think I knew myself well enough to know that school was not for me. This has always been my own decision.

Visiting School Helps Clarify Her Feelings

From Christina Nielsen (VT):

I've been homeschooling since a little after I was 6 years old. My older sister was already homeschooling, and my parents had things pretty much worked out. I would go to kindergarten, and then I was going to be homeschooled. I didn't think about homeschooling being a choice very much. I'd enjoyed kindergarten, but just took it for granted that I was homeschooling afterwards.

I always had firm ideas about "what Christina wants" in other things, but I was a little confused about homeschooling. When I was, I don't know, maybe 6 or 7, I asked my mom about it.

"Why can't I be in school?" I said.

"If you want to, you can," she said.

That was something to chew on, but I didn't want to go. I wasn't really feeling the lack of other kids my age, and I liked being home, as long as I had something to do. I was in the public library a good deal, too. There was a homeschoolers' group that was meeting in different places, and once, when it was at the library, I met a very good friend who opened up new horizons for me (she still does!).

One thing that's helped me feel that I've chosen homeschooling is that my dad teaches music in a school of grades K-8. I've gone into the school from time to time and come home with the feeling that I'm *not* going to go to school, no matter what.

I'm still curious about school, though, and I might like to try it for a week, just to see what it is like. But my feelings about it haven't changed that much. I've been to summer camps where almost all of the other kids went to school, and I felt a little odd, hearing them talk about, "My English teacher is this weirdo" or "Math is soooo boring!"

I always think, if I went to school, would I have time for all the things I do now? Could I help my dad with the garden, or volunteer at the library from 10 to 5? And, most importantly, would I have the same views on everything? I've seen, at my dad's school, kids trying to be the same as each other, doing what's cool. I wouldn't enjoy that, I don't think.

As I've gotten older (I'm now 13) I've thought more about choices, many of them having to do with homeschooling. I'm very curious about where I am in subjects compared to other kids, and I might try taking a test, just because I am, as I said, curious. But that's about it. Homeschooling is my choice, and I'm happy with it.

What She Would Give Up if She Went

From Georgina McKee (WI):

Trying to tell you why I have chosen to continue homeschooling is easier to do by telling you my story. I have one brother, four years older, named Christian. My parents made the choice not to send Christian to school. When I got to school age, they made the same choice. As far as I can see, it was the right choice. I think the reasons for this will become clear as I describe what I have done over the last ten years.

Our homeschooling was not "school at home." That is, we didn't keep to a daily schedule or use textbooks. We basically followed our interests. For Christian, that meant sitting and reading or playing with Legos. Sometimes he would do art projects while Mom read to him. For me it was different. I was almost the exact opposite of Christian. I never liked to play alone and I didn't have the patience for reading by myself quietly, although I did (and still do) love to be read to.

But I didn't just play all day. Mom always set aside time for work alone with her, usually on math or writing. Christian worked with Mom while I napped and I worked with her while he read by himself. She knew me well enough to know that I would not sit down quietly and do math worksheets, so she played games with me; Parchesi was popular. I had to count the spots on the dice and the spaces myself. We eventually moved on to harder things like Cuisenaire rods and "equation" games. Looking back now, I think this was a far more interesting way for me to learn basic math than doing hours and hours of worksheets. In fact, the whole purpose of homeschooling for us was to have the chance to learn things when we had the urge to and to do it at our own pace. So, for example, I was very interested in Pueblo Indians when I was about 5, so I studied them and made a big pueblo with toothpicks and styrofoam with Mom. Some time later, I became fascinated with whales. I studied them and wrote a story about a whale that Mom printed and had bound. After whales, I fell in love with apes and studied them for years, writing stories and making maps of where they live. In doing this, I read books that were far more advanced than what most of my friends were reading in school. These are just a few examples of how homeschooling gave me the chance to learn by exploring things at my own pace. Now, ten years after starting this process, I am dedicated to music and drama, interests I'm not sure I would have developed had I gone to school.

When I was growing up, homeschooling was all that I had ever known, and I enjoyed it. Occasionally, when I saw my friends getting on the big yellow school bus, I would say that I wanted to go too. But as I found out more about what actually went on at school, I realized that I would have to give up a lot in order to go, and the trade-off didn't seem worth it. Mostly, I didn't dwell on the question of whether to go to school.

Then, a year or two ago, I inquired about attending high school. I talked to my parents about it and they explained to me that I would lose my freedom to pursue my interests in the way that I had been doing. This confirmed what I had always known but had never really talked about. I had always been struggling with the feeling that I wasn't smart enough, that I would never be able to do what I wanted unless I got the sort of education my friends were getting. I came to realize that the "right" kind of education was not what I wanted and not what I needed for my chosen career. I had been comparing myself and my education to that of my friends who were planning careers in law or science. That did not interest me in the least, and I finally had to make the hard decision to stop comparing myself to my friends. I realized that I would only make myself miserable if I worried about how I measured up to those around me. I think that this process of examining what I had been thinking and becoming aware of what I had known about homeschooling but never discussed outright was my way of making an active choice to continue homeschooling.

I think I will always struggle to some extent with comparing myself to others, and I will miss being with my friends all day. But I think I will also always know how much I value my educational freedom, and my friends will always be my friends, whether I go to school or not!

Homeschooling Felt Like a Choice Only After She Quit School

From Rosie Records (CA):

Although I *haven't* homeschooled my whole life, I have some thoughts on this topic. My mother had been reading GWS before my sister and I were school-age, but, as she tells it, we said we wanted to be normal and go to school, so she let us go. I was in school for five years and left three years ago, when I was 10. My sister had gotten out a year or two before I did.

You might think that in these circumstances, homeschooling would feel like a choice to me: my mother had known about homeschooling for years, and my sister was already doing it. But when I quit school, it didn't feel like a choice at all. School just wasn't an option for me anymore. I wasn't a school type: I resisted getting into the cliques, and I liked books. After a while, school just got to be intolerable for me. But I had been convinced that homeschooling *wasn't* something I should do. My friends were saying to me, "Why isn't your sister in school?" and "Is your mom going to make you homeschool?" I got defensive about that. I had internalized the idea that homeschooling would make me dumb and anti-social. So although I guess I technically knew that homeschooling was an option for me, it didn't feel that way.

But I left because I couldn't stand it anymore, and now, after three years, homeschooling does feel like a choice. I recognize that it's a valid option, and if I had a choice – if my former friends were offering to be accepting of me – I still wouldn't go back to school now, because I see things so differently. In school you feel like, "When I grow up, I want to be an artist." What I say now is, "I am an artist now, and I think I'll still be one when I grow up." I have the ability to say, I am making these things in my life possible. If I decide I want to make some money for a trip, which I've done recently, I can do what I need to do in order to earn money.

I'm no longer worried about homeschooling keeping me back, and in fact I think I worry less about whether I'm learning enough than some of my homeschooling friends who have never been to school. I know what school is like, so I don't have to worry that I'm missing anything, whereas when I was in school, I wasn't truly aware of what homeschooling is actually like. So in that sense, too, it wasn't a real choice until I had tried it and knew what it was like for me.

My mother was the one who knew about homeschooling when my sister and I were little, but now I feel like it's so much my choice. It's her choice in that she's supportive of it, she chauffeurs me around and takes out library books that I'm interested in. And if I had said "I can't leave" when I was in school and miserable, she probably would have taken me out anyway because she saw that it was just too bad for me. But homeschooling is my choice and not something I do just because my mother wants me to. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Reading Aloud with Children

George Dennison, author of The Lives of Children, *was working on an essay about reading during the early 1980s (he died in 1987). His literary executors, Taylor Stoehr and Geoffrey Gardner, recovered the following fragments from Dennison's files and have generously offered them to GWS. We are pleased to publish them here for the first time.*

For several weeks, at bedtime, I've been reading Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad* to my daughter and son. The girl is 11, the boy 7. They stop me and ask for explanations, sometimes of words, sometimes of the events and personages, customs, titles, weapons, warfare, and when my explanations are too lengthy they interrupt me – usually it is the girl, who speaks the one word, "Read!" in a voice that is both peremptory and charming. And so I read. They listen with an active, contributory attention that is thrilling to see. The looks on their faces are familiar to me. We live on the outskirts of an isolated village in central Maine; there is not much to be had in the way of entertainment or cultural diversion, and so Becky and Michael play together a great deal, with what seem to be hundreds of dolls, toy animals, toy boats, cars, etc. They build ramps, houses, forests, towns, and while one talks, dreaming up the action, the other listens attentively with eyes that are opened wide yet are softly focused, and with a look of eagerness that is not impatient, but is calm and pleased ... and then *that* one speaks ... .

This is the look I see on their faces as I read them *Hadji Murad*, which students never encounter until college, usually graduate school. But they are even more engaged than in their play, more highly keyed, since the hero of this complex story is wonderfully attractive, the events are exciting and strange, and span an extraordinary range of people and places. This combination of the apprehensible and the puzzling or unknown excites and engages all the faculties of intelligence. Yet in kind it is the day-to-day condition of all children's lives, and is even – in deeper matters – the condition also of adulthood wherever the adult can afford the great luxury of reflection and critical awareness.

I told the children that the man who wrote this story was one of the greatest storytellers who ever lived. They themselves are storytellers – all people are, not perhaps in the conscious, formal sense it acquires when storytelling assumes the status of vocation, but in the everyday inescapably human activity of conveying to someone the events that occurred elsewhere or in their absence. Motives of love and delight, high energy, playfulness, memory, and verbal gifts, often make this kind of telling extremely engaging. (How much of this is going on all over the world at any given moment! In how many different languages is someone saying, right at this moment, "Can you guess what happened last night?" or "Do you know what so-and-so finally did?")

In saying that Tolstoy was one of the greatest storytellers who ever lived I was not removing him from the children's purview, was not distancing him, not creating alienation, but on the contrary putting him in a context that was already part of their lives, a pleasurable part, and that was already, in naive and unaware forms, one of the actions they themselves performed continually.

I told them what an extraordinary man he was, and that he had written a great deal for children, and Michael asked, "Is *Hadji Murad* for children?" "No," I said, "that's for big people." "Well, I like it," he said. "I don't like it," said Becky, "I *love* it!"

And I told them what extraordinary vitality Tolstoy had possessed; and when Michael asked me what *vitality* meant, I said that it meant spirit and energy. "Everything you do you do with all your strength. If somebody has great vitality it means that when other people are tired out or discouraged, he's still going strong. Tolstoy wrote this story when he was already an old man, and that's remarkable, but what's more remarkable is that he almost died of sickness but got better and then wrote it. He had enormous spirit. And he was very strong physically too. He was a wonderful gymnast. He could pick you up in one hand, Michael, and you in the other, Becky, and go up and down with you ... ."

These were delightful times for me, none sweeter – except our marathon reading of *Silas Marner* two years before. I had taken Becky and Michael – then 9 and 5 – to a shoreside camp on one of the northern lakes. We fished, swam, and canoed for four days, and then early in the morning, on our last day, we ate breakfast on the screened porch and then took up *Silas Marner*. They curled up comfortably together on a raggedy over-stuffed chair, and I sat close to them on another. Our three heads were almost touching. I read for two hours, with many many pauses for explanations, and these pauses, to me, were as pleasurable as the story, more intimate, actually. I explained the cottage industry of weaving, and what a stone

quarry was and why the water that gathered stayed there. We took a break. I made them cocoa, made coffee for myself, and we went back to the porch again and took up *Silas Marner*. Two hours later we stopped and ate lunch and talked as we ate, and then went back to the porch again and read for two hours more. Again I made cocoa and got out some cookies to go with it, and made more coffee for myself, and equipped with these goodies we went back to *Silas Marner*. After another two hours we ate supper, and in one hour more we finished the book.

Several days later, at home, after supper, I began to tell of some incident in the book to my eldest daughter, who was then 13. Michael interrupted me, adding some details I had overlooked, and Becky interrupted *him* with still more details (these too I had forgotten), and the children took over the retelling entirely, and I listened with amazement at how deeply they had entered the story, how physical and vivid all these things were to them.

And there are other incidents of reading with my eldest daughter. Nothing has been closer, warmer, more meaningful in domestic life. But now my eldest daughter, who has been in public school for several years, and who is now in prep school, is still being assigned those strange things called "vocabulary lists" – as if vocabulary existed apart from usage. Michael and Becky still attend our little parent co-op free school, and so are not subjected to this, but Michael has availed himself of some free tutoring offered by ed students at the nearby college, and at first was enthusiastic, but soon he said he wanted to stop it. "Don't you like it?" I said.

"I like it that I'm learning things," he said, "but she keeps reading these stupid dumb stories and asking me questions."

"What do you mean by 'stupid'?"

"Dick had a wagon!" he shouted. "He pulled it down the street! The wheels went around! That's what I mean!"

Where did Dick and Jane come from? Why have talentless wretches been commissioned to supply these wretched readings when great geniuses have already done the work? And what do you suppose would have happened to a pedagogue who had been admitted to Tolstoy's study and said to him, "Of course, when we expose our students to your writings we will supply intermediaries who will interpret and mediate the work to them, and tell them how to understand it, and what its parts are, and who will try as hard as possible to get them to appreciate it and to appreciate culture in general ... etc."

(Actually Tolstoy did deal with this pedagogue in his writings on education.)

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The vocabulary lists – why they are harmful. The questioning after reading should be the students (or young ones) asking their elders – since the students are the ones who want to know, and the elders are the ones who know. For the elders to question the children (except playfully and in the spirit of discussion), for them to *test* the children, introduces forces etc. that are *entirely* corrupting, and from the point of view of the story, the reading and the listening, are entirely inauthentic ... . School *distances* the authors from the children – puts a barrier between them – the barrier being the school.

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"Goals" for reading programs – as if it were good to have them! Product of alienation. Let every day have true quality, and the goals will take care of themselves.

Instruction – musicians' practice, for instance – becomes extremely sterile if it's done with an eye only to the goal of skillful playing. Even when the practice is painful and requires will, the doing itself, that event, has important present qualities as human action, and the fidelity evident within is not much answered by the idea of goals.

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The art work makes a whole form of emotion, ethics, language, etc. (beauty). This whole form is what is valuable. It isn't captured by any formula, etc. – only can be represented by itself – can be alluded to, pointed to, etc. Teaching it tends to violate the wholeness, create specious parts, not because the analytic process is superior to the whole form but because it is forced on the student by the whole weight of the institution.

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Also, because there is a developmental aspect to reading, that is, it lingers in the soul and brings about growth, answering the quiz creates a false closure and often has the effect of ejecting the book from its natural pasture in the soul.

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The idea of comprehension – especially that can be tested – is an entirely false idea: it treats the artwork as if it were a mere roadmap. *Whole forms remain in the soul. Understanding grows.* And this understanding cannot (except by the greatest philosophers) be reduced to formulas, answers, explanations. Some of it, after all, consists of attitude, yearning, love, loyalty.

Too, there's an entire class of valuable things (forms, experience) that can be described precisely as *that which is not understood*. Our tendency is to edit these away, which is foolish – the question, the attractive puzzle, stays with us, and years later acquires meaning. School would destroy it.

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Tolstoy is quite correct in basing everything on the child-experience of stories (in the evening, etc.). How sterile, by comparison, how devoid of art and death and love of the world and of humankind is our institutionalized attitude that speaks of phonemes, etc. – not that these do not exist or have no place, but they are not

They curled up comfortably together on a raggedy over-stuffed chair, and I sat close to them on another. Our three heads were almost touching.

repositories of the human spirit, and they need to learn a little modesty.

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What is desperately needed today is to humanize our way of life that has become so cold and fragmented, so expert ridden, jargon ridden, such a creature of bureaucracies and institutions, service professionals, empty symbols and appalling physical powers. I am under no illusion that the recommendations I have made here will go very far toward improving our lot, yet they are real and I believe they are essential. And when I think of those times of reading to my children, how foolish and feeble it would be to ask *What was the outcome? What did all of that lead to?* Those *were* pinnacles. Nothing could be sweeter or more fulfilling than that loving ambience, our selves lifted by our loving contact and our spirits lifted utterly by the great civilizing and caring spirit of the author, whose work itself (whatever his feeling may have been) was a caring for all of us. Language and social life, the social nature of the self, artistic form as memory, love of life, discernment, praise (not form as academics mean it). This unifying experience, that nourishes and satisfies the self to such a degree that mere self vanishes into the generosity of abundance and the benignities of authentic satisfaction – these are precisely the opposite of the experience aimed at by our mass media, our advertising, and to a dreadful extent our politics, all of which seek to destroy authentic human association, to fragment and atomize the audience, worse, to fragment the individual himself and make, as it were, mere colonials of the parts, so that mere impulse, mere trivial desire for sensations and objects will come to have status, and the satisfying of these things will come to seem like a virtue and an action of selfhood.

One Family, Two Very Different Readers

Maureen Carey (MA) writes:

Our two children's approaches to learning to read, and how we have dealt with their learning, have been very different. To those who fear unschoolers are doing nothing, let me say that nothing can be done quite differently with different children.

From toddlerhood, Aidin, now 12, spent hours a day on our laps with us, listening as we read the text and discussed the pictures in hundreds of books. For her, this was as much about coziness, contact, and paying attention to each other as it was about the stories or the skills of reading them, though she certainly enjoyed books. Our son Timmy, now 7, on the other hand, only rarely would allow us to read to him. Other than a few books with a major character named Tim or the odd book about pirates or violent superheroes, he never asked to be read to, and when he did, his attention span was short. When he was 4 or 5, what he mostly wanted to do was play roughly, often hurtfully, with friends, play with the computer, and watch television. I would try to keep all of these things to a minimum, but I had the classic unschooling dilemma: if I really am willing for his learning to be self-directed, is it really all right for him to ignore what I consider to be crucial (reading aloud together)? Yes, I decided it was. Still, shouldn't he be properly introduced to books so he could make an informed decision about whether or not he wanted to read?

Incidentally, I was raised in a household where there were no books. I never owned one as a child and have no memories of either of my parents ever reading to any of their eleven children. When I got a library card at 10 and became a constant reader, my mother complained that I was wasting my time and would ruin my eyes. All my siblings and I ended up literate and most of us are serious readers.

So, which of my children found it easiest to learn to read and was the earliest to do so? You guessed it: Timmy. No one in our family actually knows how either child learned to read; we can only explain what we were thinking and what we did.

Aidin has never had a day with enough hours in it to accomplish all she has in mind to do. She always seemed to use her time well, playing

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creative fantasy games with her friends when they were available and otherwise with her toys. We believed children learn naturally through play and we could see that Aidin was developing many skills. Because she enthusiastically wanted them, she also had formal teacher-led lessons in drama, music, sports, dance, and foreign languages. She spent years on soccer teams, in Girl Scouts, folk dancing, and in many amateur theater productions. We travel a great deal, and she has always seemed to get a lot out of that. But mostly, for years, her life consisted of playing, very imaginatively, with her friends, her cat, her toys, and her parents.

She requested her first math lesson at the age of 5, when she said she wanted to learn how to tell time and I explained that she would have to be able to multiply by 5 to read a clock. She showed me that she already understood how to multiply in her head and could already do almost all of the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, and 11 tables and major parts of the others. The second time she requested math lessons was five years later, at age 10, when she demonstrated that she had all the mathematical skills considered necessary up to fifth grade level. And, more important, she experienced pleasure and her own power in dealing with numbers and saw humor in mathematical patterns. My own wasted years of schooling in math convinced me that I am not good in math, a feeling I share with most women I know. In sharp contrast, Aidin enjoyed math, was doing fine, and had confidence in herself.

Reading was quite a different story. On the few occasions that she said she wanted to learn to read, she would cuddle beside me on the sofa and then in less than five minutes of my very low-key instruction, either explaining phonics or helping her through simple sentences in beginning readers, we would both become almost unbearably nervous. She would remember that she really meant it when she said, most of the time, that she didn't want to be taught to read because she wanted to hear everything in the books from my mouth.

I was more than willing to read to her all the time, but I was also anxious for her to be able to read herself and I found it hard that the years were passing and this little person, who had seemed to have all the necessary pre-reading skills and to be on the verge of reading for so long, was approaching the age of 10 and still wasn't able to read. My often difficult task was not to pressure her, and fortunately I had great support from my homeschooling community and from the dozens of books and GWS articles I read.

Aidin herself did not seem to mind not being able to read, was not embarrassed when others found out, and developed fine skills for coping. When she became a Girl Scout at 8 1/2, for example, I was afraid that it would be humiliating for her when the other girls noticed she couldn't read. I actually doubted the wisdom of her joining the troop. But when we discussed my fears, she said she would just get the other kids to do the required reading for her. And so she did. During this time, her best friend, who went to school, was very addicted to reading, and Aidin was often annoyed by her constant practice of reading at inappropriate times. This child used books to avoid dealing with the people around her. It was clear to both of us that books are not always the entirely positive influence most people assume they are.

The major criticism I kept getting from others was that I was cutting Aidin off from a great body of literature that was developmentally correct and even necessary for her. But it seemed to me that she benefited enormously from sharing her introduction to great literature with me. Reading is so much more than the technical task of forming words out of letters. It is access to the world of ideas and people beyond those you are able to know in the times and places in which you live. Reading gives you time to think about things, and this is what Aidin and I got to share with each other. I got to read many good books I would have missed and, best of all, share the ones that had been significant in my own life. Reading to her as she gets older means close discussion of each character and incident and moral dilemma that is presented. She lets no detail get past her and loves to be able to think out loud about what ideas are being illustrated.

We can't date exactly when Aidin truly mastered reading on her own, as it was a gradual process of at least a year, between 9 1/2 and 10 1/2. She had never liked to follow along when I read, although she did it a bit over the years. Otherwise, she seemed to learn by some kind of natural process that was not apparent to us or to her. Within a year of becoming what she

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and I defined as a reader (able to read chapter books to herself with understanding), she could read Shakespeare cold with appropriate expression.

Aidin is happy that she can read well, and I am weak enough to enjoy being relieved of the pressure of my own worry and the comments of others. But I am now happy that Aidin was a late reader, for a number of reasons. I am pleased that we did allow her to follow her own internal schedule. I was forced to live up to my best intentions of spending a lot of time with her, as that was the only way she could read the books she was dying to read. I have had a wonderful time, which I would not have missed. Our habits of reading together are so firmly ingrained and important to both of us that we continue to read aloud together as much now as we did before she could read herself.

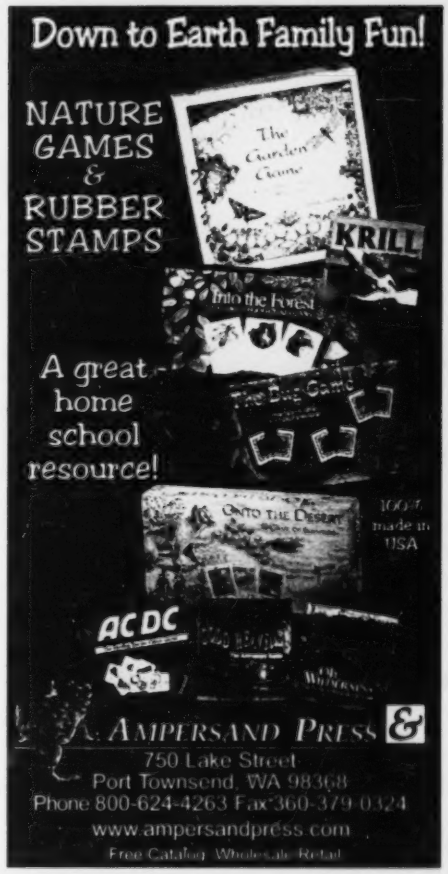
Timmy, as I said, followed a totally different path. Even though he had a similar learning environment, and even though he saw his sister and me reading together daily, Timmy showed little early interest in books. From the beginning, Timmy was far more focused on things, and less on his relationships with people, than his sister had been. If she was "watching" Sesame Street, it was really just background to the games she was playing, or she made me watch it with her so she could talk about the characters and their adventures. She never seemed to pay attention to the soundbite lessons they presented about specific lessons and numbers. But when Timmy watched it, he really watched it. He did not care who else was in the room, he never talked about it, and he never played imaginatively. Before he was 2, he seemed to have absorbed all those thirty-second lessons; he could recite and recognize the alphabet and numbers up to 20. I don't know for sure that the show was where he learned all this, but it seemed so at the time.

Timmy read signs, labels, and titles of games and books by the age of 3. We thought he did it by recognition. Whenever I did teach him something that he asked to learn, he usually retained it after the first time it was explained. He just pays remarkable attention when he wants to know something, and he picks things up very easily. He takes this totally for granted and never shows pride or pleasure in learning quickly; he just assumes that he knows or can easily learn whatever captures his interest.

As Timmy was approaching his sixth birthday, because he was often restless and did not seem to use his abundant free time in ways that seemed satisfying to him, I decided to try to teach him to read so that he would have that choice of activity. It wasn't that I thought he needed to learn to read at that age, and I was quite willing to back off if he wasn't happy. My chief motivation was to help him be happier. Unlike his sister, he had never developed good skills at playing alone, and whereas with Aidin I always saw that she was developing and learning through her play, I had no such confidence in his use of time. I may have been mistaken, but those were my instincts. So I took the rather drastic, for me, step of actually teaching him to read. I am still not sure it was the right thing, but it worked in that he quickly learned.

I said that, unlike Aidin, Timmy had never wanted to be read to, but now I encouraged him to sit beside me while I read to him some very basic readers that started with simple words and progressed from there. Unlike with Aidin, the books were not his choice and were not read for their story but just for their words. He accepted this well for about thirty minutes most days. In under two weeks, he could read almost anything he wanted to. Since no one can really be taught to read in less than twelve hours of direct instruction, I was obviously building on his own readiness. He practically knew how to read at this point, and I helped. He has continued on his own with no further instruction for almost two years, and now has a large reading vocabulary. He can also spell well, which is a struggle for both his sister and me.

These very different experiences have left me with enormous confidence in each of my children as learners. I am now much more relaxed. Each child presented a situation that was in some respects a struggle, and I did the best I could with the child and the circumstances before me. ◆



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Dayspring Christian Academy. PO Box 60956, Palo Alto CA 94306
G.A.T.E. School. 1725 N Date #43, Mesa AZ 85201; 969-4821
Grassroots Free School. 2458 Grassroots Way, Tallahassee FL 32301; 904-656-3629
HCL Boston School. PO Box 2920, Big Bear City CA 92314; 909-585-7188
Horizon Academy, 21102 Pleasant Park Rd, Conifer CO 80433; 303-697-8158
Independence Private School. c/o Principal: M. Black; 45 Albert St North, Orilla, ONT L3V 5K3, Canada
The Learning Community. 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia MD 21045; 410-730-0073
The Learning Community, Inc. PO Box 5177, Herndon VA 22070
Little Piney School. Rt 1 Box 20, Newburg MO 65550
Little Red Home School. 9669 E 123rd, Hastings MN 55033; 437-3049
Magic Meadow School. PO Box 29, N San Juan CA 95960
Meter Schools. PO Box 427, Rosharon TX 77583
Mount Vernon Academy. 184 Vine St, Murray UT 84107
Mt Carmel Academy. RD 1 Box 1737, Waterville VT 05492
Newbridge School. 3131 Olympic Blvd, Santa Monica CA 90404; 310-315-3056
Pilgrim Christian School. 3759 E 57th St, Maywood CA 90270; 213-585-3167
Pinewood School. 112 Road D, Pine CO 80470; 303-670-8180
Puget Sound Community School, 1715 112 Av NE, Bellevue WA 98004; 206-455-7617
Rocky Mountain High Academy. PO Box 418, Flora Vista NM 87415
Santa Fe Community School. PO Box 2241, Santa Fe NM 87501; 505-471-6928
Seedling. c/o Joy Reiter, 69 Sanderson Crescent, Richmond Hill Ontario L4C 5L5, Canada
Sidney Ledson School. 33 Overland Dr, Don Mills, Ont, Canada M3C 2C3; 416-447-5355
TEACH. 4350 Lakeland Ave, N Robbinsdale MN 55422
Thalassa!, 5917 Oak Av, Suite 176, Temple City CA 91780-2404; 818-287-8595
Upattinas School, 429 Greenridge Rd, Glenmoore PA 19343; 610-458-5138
Virtual High and WonderTree Education Society. PO Box 380, Vancouver BC V5Z 4L9, Canada 604-739-5941

Homeschooling Organizations

Some of these groups are statewide (look for the state name in the group's title as an indication) and are likely to have information about state laws or regulations, and may have conferences and packets of information for new homeschoolers. Other groups are local support groups that are likely to have meetings and activities. Both state and local groups may have newsletters. Try getting in touch with a state group even if it's far away from where you live; many state groups can refer you to families, or smaller support groups, in your immediate area.

State or Local Groups (alphabetically by state):

AL Alabama Home Educators. PO Box 16091, Mobile 36116
East Lake UMC Academy, 1603 Great Pine Rd, Birmingham 35235 (acts as cover school)
AK Alaska Homeschoolers Assoc. PO Box 230973, Anchorage 99523-0973; 907-333-4840
Alaska HomeSpun Educators. PO Box 798, Girdwood 99587; email 102155.700@compuserve.com
Sitka Home Educators. PO Box 1191, Sitka 99835
AZ Arizona Families for Home Education, PO Box 4661, Scottsdale 85261-4661; 800-929-3927
Bethany Home Educators. 2720 S Flint Cir, Mesa 85202
East Valley Educators (Phoenix-Metro area). Sue 602-983-5660 or Sylvia 602-987-1404
Home School Supplies, 1125 E Quick Draw Pl, Tucson 85749
Phoenix Learning Alternatives Network. 8835 N 47th Pl, Phoenix 85028; 602-483-3381
SPICE. 10414 W Mulberry Dr, Avondale 85323; SusanT@AZTEC.asu.edu
AR AR Christian Home Education Assoc, PO Box 501, Little Rock 72203
Coalition of AR Parents, PO Box 192455, Little Rock 72219; 501-565-6583
CA California Homeschool Network, PO Box 44, Vineburg 95487-0044; 800-327-5339; email CHNMAIL@aol.com
Central Coast Homeschool Network, c/o Chris Whiting, 12 Marian Way, Pismo Beach 93449; 805-473-3212
Christian Home Educators of CA. PO Box 28644, Santa Ana 92799-8644; 714-537-5121
Esparto Homeschoolers. PO Box 305, Esparto 95627; 916-787-3613
Home School Assoc of CA. PO Box 2442, Atascadero 93423-2442; 888-HSC-4440; web page www.hsc.org (newsletter, legal news, local support)
Homefires: The Journal of Homeschooling, 180 El Camino Real, Suite 10, Millbrae CA 94030; 1-888-4-HOME-ED
Homeschooling Coop of Sacramento, 15 Moses Ct, Sacramento 95823-6368
Humboldt Homeschoolers, PO Box 2125, Trinidad 95570; 707-677-3290
Learning Naturally. PO Box 5759, Shasta Lake 96089-5759; 916-247-0431
Los Angeles Homeschoolers, PO Box 1166, Malibu 90265; 310-456-3845
Mtn View Park Homeschoolers. 6603 Mammoth Av, Van Nuys 91405-4813
North Santa Clara Valley Homeschoolers. 795 Sheraton Dr, Sunnyvale 94087
Peninsula Homeschoolers. 4795 Lage Dr, San Jose 95130; 408-379-6835
Riverside Area Home Learners. 731 Mt Whitney Cir, Corona 91719; 909-279-4026
San Diego Home Educators, JoAnn, 619-560-8866
San Francisco Homeschoolers, c/o Anne Donjacour, 41 Eastwood Dr, San Francisco 94112-1225
School of Home Learning Support Group. 1904 Flora Vista St, Needles 92363; 619-326-2107
Sonoma County Homeschoolers Assoc, PO Box 431, Petaluma 94953; 707-

874-2740

South St Centre, Box 261, Boulder Creek 95006 (resource ctr for families)
South Valley Homeschoolers Assn, Box 961, San Martin 95046
SPICE, c/o PO Box 282, Wilton 95693
Tri-City Homeschoolers, 39195 Levi St, Newark 94560
West River Unschoolers, 2420 N 1 St, Grand Junction 81501; 970-241-4137
Whittier Homeschoolers, 7432 Duchess Dr, Whittier 90606; 310-695-7646
Wildflower Homeschoolers, 1557 Vancouver Way, Livermore 94550; 510-455-0465

Yosemite Area Homeschoolers, PO Box 74, Midpines 95345

CO Boulder County Home Educators, c/o Berg, 1495 Riverside, Boulder 80304; 303-449-5916

Colorado Home Educators' Assoc, 3043 S Laredo Cir, Aurora 80013; 303-441-9938; email chea@tms-co.com

CO Home Schooling Network, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia 80135; 303-688-4136
Colorado Springs Homeschoolers, 2906 Marilyn Rd, Colorado Springs 80909; 719-598-8444

Fall River Homeschool, PO Box 3322, Idaho Springs 80452
Home Educators for Excellence of Durango, c/o Gring, 315 Timberline Dr, Durango 81301

Mesa Verde Homeschoolers, PO Box 134, Mancos 81328; 970-882-7802
Rocky Mtn Education Connection, 20774 E Buchanan Dr, Aurora 80011

CT Connecticut Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 250, Cobalt 06414; 203-781-8569

Unschoolers' Support, 22 Wildrose Av, Guilford 06437; 203-458-7402

DE Tri State Homeschoolers Assoc, PO Box 7193, Newark 19714-7193

FL Florida Assoc for Schools at Home, 1000 Devil's Dip, Tallahassee 32308; 904-878-2793 (general statewide info)
Florida Parent-Educators Association, PO Box 1193, Venice 34284-1193; 813-492-6938 (primarily Christian group)
Homeschool Network, 548 N Lake Pleasant Rd, Apopka 32712-3904; 407-889-4632
Parent Assisted Learners (PALS), 6820 SW 65 Av, Miami 33143; 305-665-1470
Parkland Home Educators, 2111 Oakhurst Av, Winter Park 32792; 407-679-6890; 657-7560
Redlands Christian Home Educators, 9870 Martinique Dr, Cutler Ridge 33189; 305-233-2021
Tallahassee Homeschool Grp, Kathy Tripp, 904-575-7091

GA Atlanta Alternative Education Network, c/o Sheffield, 1672 Cody Cir, Tucker 30084; 404-636-6348
Cobb County Homeschoolers, 813 Wyntuck Dr, Kennesaw 30144
Free to Learn at Home, 4439 Lake Forest Dr, Oakwood 30566; 770-536-8077 (teen group)
Georgians for Freedom in Education, 7180 Cane Leaf Dr, Fairburn 30213; 770-463-1563
Harvest Home Educators, PO Box 1756, Buford 30518; 770-455-0449
North Side Atlanta Homeschoolers, c/o Jane Kelly, 4141 Wieuca, Atlanta 30342

HI Christian Homeschoolers of Hawaii, 910824 Oama St, Ewa Beach 96706; 689-6398
Hawaii Homeschool Assoc, PO Box 3476, Mililani 96789
Hawaii Island Home Educators, 968-8076 or 965-9002
The Tropical Homeschooler (newsletter), c/o Pinsky, 220 Waipalani Rd, Haiku, Maui 96708; 808-572-9289

IA Iowa Families for Christian Education, RR 3 Box 143, Missouri Valley 51555
Iowa Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 213, Des Moines 50301

ID Family Unschooling Network, 1809 N 7 St, Boise 83702; 208-345-2703
Home Educators of ID, 3618 Pine Hill Dr, Coeur d'Alene 83814; 208-667-2778

IL Evanston Home Educators, Nancy Guenther, 708-675-3632
HOUSE, c/o Anne Wasserman, 806 Oakton, Evanston 60202; 847-328-7129 (statewide)
Illinois Christian Home Educators, PO Box 261, Zion 60099
Spectrum Homeschoolers, c/o Karolyn Kuehner, 10859 S. Longwood Dr, Chicago 60643-3312; 773-779-7608
Unschoolers Network, 736 N Mitchell Av, Arlington Hts 60004; 847-253-8902; email PJADK@aol.com

IN Families Learning Together, c/o Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51 St, Indianapolis 46205; 317-255-9298
Indiana Assoc of Home Educators, 1000 N Madison #S2, Greenwood 46142; 317-638-9633
Kentuckiana Home Educators (KY & IN area), see KY, below
LEARN, 9577 E State Rd 45, Unionville 47468; 812-336-8028 (Bloomington area)
Wabash Valley Homeschool Assoc, c/o Palmer, 2515 E Quinn Av, Terre Haute 47805; 812-466-9467

KS Central Kansas Homeschoolers, c/o Susan Peach, Rt 1 Box 28A, Rush Center 67575
Christian Home Educators Confederation of Kansas, PO Box 3564, Shawnee Mission 66203
Lawrence Area Unaffiliated Grp of Homeschoolers, c/o Michener, RR 1 Box 496, Perry 66073
Teaching Parents Assoc, PO Box 3968, Wichita 67201; 316-945-0810

KY Kentuckiana Home Educators, 6906 Timber Ridge Ct, Prospect 40059; 502-228-6906 (KY & IN area)
Kentucky Home Education Assoc, PO Box 81, Winchester 40392-0081
Madison County Homeschool Assoc, 239 Reeves Rd, Richmond 40475

LA Home Educators Network, 59126 Thompson Rd, Slidell 70460
Louisiana Citizens for Home Education, 3404 Van Buren, Baker 70714; 504-775-5472
SW Acadiana Homeschoolers, 507 S. Arenas, Rayne 70578; 318-334-2812
Wild Azalea Unschoolers, 6055 General Meyer Av, New Orleans 70131; 504-392-5647

ME Maine Homeschool Association, PO Box 421, Topsham 04086; 1-800-520-0577
Peninsula Area Homeschooling Assoc, PO Box 235, Deer Isle 04627
Sebago Lake Homeschoolers Support Grp, RR 2 Box 54, Sebago Lake 04075; 207-642-4368
Southern Maine Home Education Support Network, 76 Beech Ridge Rd, Scarborough 04074; 207-883-9621
Western Washington Cty Homeschoolers, RFD 1 Box 93, Harrington 04643

MD Educating Our Own, 686 Geneva Dr, Westminster 21157; 410-857-0168
Glen Burnie Home School Support Grp, c/o Whetzel, 6514 Dolphin Ct, Glen Burnie 21061
Maryland Home Education Assoc, 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia 21045; 410-730-0073
Maryland-Pennsylvania Home Educators, see under Pennsylvania
North County Home Educators and **Family Unschoolers Network**, 1688 Bellhaven Woods Ct, Pasadena 21122-3727

MA ALOHA (A Loosely Organized Homeschool Assoc), c/o Hazelton, 24A Calamint Rd N, Princeton 01541; 508-464-7794
Apple Country Homeschooling Assoc, PO Box 246, Harvard 01451; 508-456-8515
Berkshire Homeschoolers Grp, 217 Old State Rd, Berkshire 01224; 413-443-1770
Cape Ann Homeschoolers, 1088 Main St, Rockport 01966; 508-546-7125
Franklin County Homelearning Families, JeanJohnson, 72 Prospect St, Greenfield 01301; 413-773-9280
Greater Boston Home Educators, 617-246-2059 (Wakefield)
Groton-Dunstable Home Educators, c/o Leslie McLeod-Warrick, 663 Townsend Rd, Groton 01450; 508-448-0929
Homeschoolers of Mass. Education Club (Boston area), contact Phoebe Wells, 617-876-7273
Homeschooling Together (Arlington/Belmont area), Sophia Sayigh 617-641-0566
Lowell area Group, Debbie Finch, 508-458-3896
Mass. Home Educators, 22 Garland St, Lynn 01902; 617-599-6267
Mass. Home Learning Assoc, PO Box 1558 Marstons Mills 02648; W. Mass. contact Loretta Heuer 508-429-1436; E. Mass. contact Kathy Smith 508-249-9056
Newburyport Area Homeschool Network, 32 Columbus Av, Newburyport 01950; 508-462-5680
North Shore Support Grp, 508-468-4663 or 508-658-8970
Plymouth PALS, Eileen Fortunato 508-747-0297
Southeastern Mass. Homeschool Assoc, PO Box 4336, Fall River 02723-0403; 508-672-0248
Wakefield area Group, Lucia Jenkins 617-246-2059

MI Bay City Homeschooling Support Grp, 517-684-6130
Benzie Home Educators, PO Box 208, Benzonia 49616
Families Learning and Schooling at Home (FLASH), 21671 B Drive N, Marshall 45068; 616-781-1069
Heritage Home Educators, 2122 Houser Rd, Holly 48442
Home Educators' Circle, 1280 S John Hix, Westland 48186; 313-326-5406
Information Network for Christian Homes, 4150 Ambrose NE, Grand Rapids 49505
Learning Tree Resource Ctr, PO Box 69, Atlantic Mine 49905; 906-482-6393
Older Homeschoolers Group, c/o Linn Family, 9120 Dwight Dr, Detroit 48214
OWL (Oakland, Washtenaw, Livingston) Homeschool Support Group, c/o Debra Cohn, 6036 Seven Mile, S Lyon 48178; 810-437-8631
Sunnyridge Alternative Learning Ctr, HCO 1 Box 134, Pelkie 49958

MN Fargo-Moorehead Homeschool Assoc, 1909 8th St S, Moorehead 56560
Minnesota Homeschoolers Alliance, PO Box 23072, Richfield 55423; 612-399-1748 (statewide)

MS Home Educators of Central Mississippi, c/o McDonald, 109 W Willow Ct, Ridgeland 39157; 601-366-9218
Oxford Homeschool Network, 21 CR 3024, Oxford 38655

MO Families for Home Education, 400 E High Pt Ln, Columbia 65203; 816-826-9302
Kansas City Homeschoolers & Unschoolers, 4112 Genesee, Kansas City 64111; 816-931-7089
Ozark Lore Society, c/o Eisenmann, HC 73 Box 160, Drury 65638; 417-679-3391 (Ozark area grp)
St. Louis Homeschool Network, Karen Karabel, 4147 W Pine, St. Louis 63108; 314-534-1171

MT The Grapevine (statewide newsletter), PO Box 3228, Missoula 59806; 406-542-8721
Independent Homeschoolers Network of Bozeman, 415 S 9 Av, Bozeman 59715; 406-586-4564
Montana Coalition of Home Educators, PO Box 43, Gallatin Gateway 59730; 406-587-6163

NE LEARN, 7741 E Avon Ln, Lincoln 68505; 402-488-7741
Nebraska Indep. Homeschoolers Network, 8010 Lillibridge St, Lincoln 68506
Omaha Proj for Education and Nurturing, 9218 Leavenworth, Omaha 68114
Prairie Christian Home Schools, Rt 3 Box 73, Ord 68862

NV Home Schools United/Vegas Valley, PO Box 23564, Las Vegas 89193-3564; 702-870-9566

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Parent Activists Committed to Education, PO Box 13587, Las Vegas 89112; 702-457-1509

NH: New Hampshire Alliance for Home Education, 16 Winter Circle, Manchester 03103; 603-424-4060

NH Home School Coalition, PO Box 2224, Concord 03302; 603-539-7233

Orchard School Homeschooling Support Grp, Kathleen Burch, HC 63 Box 52, Alstead 03602; 603-835-6086

Support Alternative Family Educ, PO Box 15, Plaistow 03865; 603-382-3839

NJ: Jersey Shore Christian Homeschoolers Assoc, 65 Middlesex Rd, Matawan 07747-3030

North Jersey Home Schoolers Assoc, 44 Oak St, Hillsdale 07642; 201-666-6025

Sussex County Home Education Organization, 875-6178

The Tutor, 1239 Whitaker Av, Millville 08332; 609-327-1224

Unschoolers Network, 2 Smith St, Farmingdale 07727; 908-938-2473 (statewide)

Unschooling Fams. Support Grp of Central NJ, RD 1 Box 713, Jobston 08041; 609-723-1524

NM: Glorieta Family Educators, Star Rt 1 Box 404, Glorieta 87535

Home Educators of Santa Fe, 21 Frasco Rd, Santa Fe 87505; 505-466-4462

Homeschooling PACT, c/o Senn, Box 961, Portales 88130; 505-359-1618

New Mexico Family Educators, PO Box 92276, Albuquerque 87199-2276; 505-889-9775

NM Christian Home Educators, 5749 Paradise Blvd NW, Albuquerque 87114; 505-897-1772

Unschoolers of Albuquerque, 8116 Princess Jeanne NE, Albuquerque 87110; 505-299-2476

NY: Albany Area Homeschoolers, 46 Pershing Dr, Scotia 12302; 518-346-3413

Families for Home Education, 3219 Coulter Rd, Cazenovia 13035; 315-655-2574

Fingerlakes Unschoolers Network, 201 Elm St, Ithaca 14850; 607-273-6257

Homeschoolers Network of the Mid-Hudson Valley, RD 2 Box 211P, Ski Run Rd, Bloomingburg NY 12721; 914-733-1002

Long Island Homeschoolers Assoc, 4 Seville Pl, Massapequa Park 11762; 516-795-5554

New York City Home Educators Alliance, PO Box 1214 Murray Hill Station, NY 10156; 212-505-9884

NY State Home Education News, PO Box 59, E Chatham 12060; 518-392-6900

OASIS (Oneonta area Sharing in Schooling), PO Box 48, Gilbertsville 13776; 607-783-2271

Rochester Area Homeschoolers Assoc, 275 Yarmouth Rd, Rochester 14610; 716-271-0845

Tri-County Homeschoolers, c/o Hofer, PO Box 190, Ossining NY 10562; 914-941-5607

Western NY Homeschoolers, Gloria Zemer, 18 Maple Av, Portville 14770; 716-933-8669

NC: Families Learning Together, 1670 NC 33 West, Chocowinity 27817; email cn2464@abaco.coastalnet.com

The Home Education Assoc, 300 Brown Cir, Rolesville 27571; 919-554-1563

North Carolinians for Home Education, 419 N Boylan Av, Raleigh 27603-1211; 919-834-NCHE

ND: ND Home School Assoc, PO Box 486, Mandan 58554; 701-223-4080

OH: Christian Parents Assoc, 310 Bluebonnet Dr, Findlay 45840

Families Unschooling in the Neighborhood (FUN), 3636 Paris Blvd, Westerville 43081; 614-794-2171; email Roy@gn.net

Growing Together, c/o Nancy McKibben 1676 Trendril Ct, Columbus 43229

Heights Homeschoolers, 2065 Halsey, S Euclid 44118

Home Education League of Parents (Central Ohio), PO Box 14296, Columbus 43214; 614-470-2219

Home Education Resource Org, 4 Erie St, Norwalk 44857; 419-668-6480

Home School Network of Greater Cincinnati, 642 Romohr Acres, Cincinnati 45244; 732-6355

Ohio Home Educators Network, PO Box 23054, Chagrin Falls 44023-0054; 216-786-8001 or 330-274-0542

Parents Enriching Alt. Childhood Educ., 9520 Co Rd 10-2, Delta 43515; 337-4810

OK: Cornerstone (Tulsa area), PO Box 459, Sperry 74073; 918-425-4162

Home Educators Resource Organization, 4401 Quail Run Av, Skiatook 74070-4024; 918-396-0108 (statewide grp supporting unschooling) and HERO Resource Center, c/o Lucy Clark, 916 82 Av, Norman 73071

OK Central Home Educators Consociation, PO Box 270601, OKC 73137

Oklahoma Christian Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 471363, Tulsa 74147

OR: The Learning Connection, PO Box 1091 #196, Grants Pass 97526; 541-476-5686; janemj.tlc@juno.com

Mid-Valley Secular Homeschoolers (Salem area), 503-362-1203

Oregon Home Education Network, 4470 SW Hall Blvd #286, Beaverton 97005; 503-321-5166

Parents Education Assoc, PO Box 1482, Beaverton 97075; 503-645-3709

Portland Area Tri-County Homeschoolers, PO Box 82415, Portland 97282; 503-641-7813

Willamette Homeschoolers, 245 W 27th Av, Eugene 97405

PA: Chester County Homeschoolers, 226 Liandoverry, Exton 19341

Diversity United in Homeschooling, 233 Bluebell Av, Langhorne 19047; 215-321-4813

Endless Mountains Homeschoolers (N Central PA), c/o Kellogg, RD 3 Box 80, Columbia Cross Rds 16914; 717-549-8179

Maryland-PA Home Educators, PO Box 67, Shrewsbury 17361; 717-993-3603

Pennsylvania Home Education Network, 285 Allegheny St, Meadville 16335; 412-561-5288

Pennsylvania Homeschoolers, RD 2 Box 117, Kittanning 16201; 412-783-6512

People Always Learning Something (PALS), 4645 Cook Av, Pittsburgh 15236; 412-885-0132

RI: Parent Educators of RI, PO Box 782, Glendale 02826

Rhode Island Guild of Home Teachers (Home Spun News), Box 11, Hope RI 02831; 401-821-7700

SC: Carolina SuperSchoolers, 777 Hillview St, Spartanburg 29302

Home Organization of Parent Educators, c/o Griesemer, 1697 Dotterer's Run, Charleston 29414; 763-7833

Teacher's Ink (formerly Homeschool Assoc of SC), PO Box 13386, Charleston 29422; 803-795-9982; email pfmsuper@worldnet.att.net

South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools, PO Box 2104, Irmo 29063

South Carolina Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 612, Lexington 28071-0612; 803-951-8960

South Carolina Homeschool Alliance, 1679 Memorial Park Rd, Suite 179, Lancaster 29720; email ConnectSC@aol.com

SD: South Dakota Home School Assoc, PO Box 882, Sioux Falls 57101; 605-338-9689

TN: Home Education Assoc of TN, 3677 Richbriar Ct, Nashville 37211

Tennessee Homeschooling Families, 1356 Cove Ln, Oliver Springs TN 37840

TX: Austin Area Homeschoolers, 510 Park Blvd, Austin 78751

Houston Alternative Education Alliance, 12811 Ivy Forest Dr, Cypress 77429

Houston Unschoolers Group, Holly Furgason, 9625 Exeter Rd, Houston 77093; 713-695-4888; furgason@swbell.net

Metroplex Middle of the Road (Home) Educators, 1702 S Hwy 121, Suite 607-110, Lewisville 75067; 214-724-1026

North Texas Self-Educators, c/o Jordan, 150 Forest Ln, Double Oak/Lewisville 75067; 817-430-4835

Texas Homeschool Coalition, 806-797-4927

UT: FCLA Utah Spice Group, 1510 W 500 N, Provo 84601; 801-377-4728

Salt Lake Home Educators, 801-269-1997

Utah Home Education Association, PO Box 570218, Sigurd 84657-0218; 801-535-1533 or 801-342-4027

VT: Christian Home Educators of VT, 802-476-9921

Resource Center for Homeschooling, c/o Deb Shell, RR 2 Box 289C, Polly Hubbard Rd, St Albans 05478; 802-524-9645

Vermont Homeschoolers Assoc, RD 2 Box 4440, Bristol 05443; 802-453-5460

Windham County Homeschoolers, RR 2 Box 1332, Putney 05346

VA: ALOFT (Alt. Learning Options for Free Thinkers), 2120 Wiggington Rd, Lynchburg 24502

Blue Ridge Area Network for Congenial Homeschooling, c/o Amy Birdwell, 255 Ipswich Pl, Charlottesville 22901

Community of Independent Learners, PO Box 16029, Alexandria 22302; 703-998-9626

Home Educators Network, 3320 Waverly Dr, Fredericksburg 22401

Home Instruction Support Group, 217 Willow Terr, Sterling 22170

LEARN/No. VA Homeschoolers, c/o Vernon, 1111 Waynewood Blvd, Alexandria 22308

Learning in a Family Environment (LIFE), 40672 Tankerville Rd, Lovettsville 20180; email EBarkan@aol.com

Richmond Educ'l Alternatives for Children at Home (REACH), Box 36174, Richmond 23235-8003; 804-795-7624; carmel@compuserve.com; www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/7440/

VA Home Education Assoc, Rt 1 Box 370, Gordonsville 22942; 540-832-3578; email vhea@virginia.edu

WA: Clark County Home Educators, PO Box 5941, Vancouver 98668

Families Learning Together, Box 10 Tiger Star Rt, Colville 99114

Family Academy, 146 SW 153rd #290, Seattle 98166

Family Learning Organization, PO Box 7247, Spokane 99207; 509-467-2552 (also statewide)

Homeschoolers' Support Assoc, PO Box 413, Maple Valley 98038; 206-432-9805

Palouse Home Learning Alternatives, SE 405 Hill, Pullman 99163

Rainbow Way Playgroup, c/o Bystrom, 8632 Inverness Dr NE, Seattle 98115-3936; 206-522-4313

Seattle Homeschool Grp, 819 NE 84, Seattle 98115; 206-525-8359; email pstielstra@aol.com

Teaching Parents Assoc, PO Box 1934, Woodinville 98072-1934

Washington Homeschool Organization, 18130 Midvale Av N, Seattle 98133; 206-298-8942

Whatcom Homeschool Assoc, 3851 Britton Rd, Bellingham 98226

WV: Marion Cty Home Education Org, RR 6 Box 336, Fairmont 26554

WV Home Ed's Assoc, PO Box 3707, Charleston 25337-3707; 1-800-736-9843

WI: Families in Schools at Home (FISH), 4639 Conestoga Trail, Cottage Grove 53527

HOME (Madison Chapter), 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison 53705; 608-238-3302

Unschooling Families, 1908 N. Clark St, Appleton 54911; 414-735-9832

Wisconsin Parents Assoc, PO Box 2502, Madison 53701

WY: Unschoolers of Wyoming, 429 Hwy 230, #20, Laramie 82070

National or General Homeschool Groups:

American Homeschool Assoc, PO Box 1125, Republic WA 99166-1125; 509-486-2477

Holt Associates/Growing Without Schooling, 2269 Massachusetts Ave,

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Cambridge MA 02140; 617-864-3100
Home Education Magazine/Home Education Press, PO Box 1083, Tonasket WA 98855; 509-486-1351
Home School Legal Defense Assoc, PO Box 159, Paeonian Springs VA 22129; 540-338-5600
Home School Researcher, see Nat'l Home Education Research Institute
Homeschool Support Network/Home Educator's Family Times, PO Box 1056, Gray ME 04039; 207-657-2800
Nat'l Center for Home Education, PO Box 200, Paeonian Spgs VA 22129; 540-338-7600
Nat'l Home Education Research Institute, Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Dr SE, Salem OR 97301-9392; 503-375-7019
Nat'l Homeschool Association, PO Box 290, Hartland MI 48353; 513-772-9580
Nat'l Homeschool Service, PO Box 167, Rodeo NM 88056; 505-557-2250
The Teaching Home, PO Box 20219, Portland OR 97220-0219

Special-Interest Homeschooling Groups:

At Our Own Pace, c/o Jean Kulczyk, 102 Willow Dr, Waukegan IL 60087; 847-662-5432 (newsletter for homeschooling families with special needs)
The Drinking Gourd (homeschoolers of color), PO Box 2557, Redmond WA 98073; 206-836-0336 or 1-800-TDG-5487
Home School Assoc for Christian Science Families, 445 Airport Rd, Tioga TX 76271
Homeschoolers for Peace & Justice, PO Box 74, Midpines CA 95345
Homeschoolers Travel Network, NHA, 10755 Hibner Rd, Hartland MI 48353
Homeschooling Unitarian Universalists and Humanists, 3135 Lakeland Dr, Nashville TN 37214-3312; 615-889-4938
Islamic Homeschool Assoc of North America, 1312 Plymouth Ct, Raleigh NC 27610
Jewish Home Educator's Network, c/o M. Lowe, 1295 Marshall Dr SE, Salem OR 97302; 503-362-1203; email marilyn.lowe@chemek.com
Nat'l Assoc of Catholic Home Educators, PO Box 420225, San Diego CA 92142
Nat'l Assoc of Mormon Home Educators, 2770 S 1000 West, Perry UT 84302
Nat'l Challenged Homeschoolers Assoc (NATHHAN), 5383 Alpine Rd SE, Olalla WA 98359; 206-857-4257
Nat'l Handicapped Homeschoolers Assoc, 814 Shavertown Rd, Boothwyn PA 19061; 215-459-2035
Simon of Cyrene Assoc (African-American Homeschoolers of Christian Faith), PO Box 26357, Rochester NY 14626

Homeschool Groups Outside of U.S.

Canada:

Alberta Home Education Assoc, c/o Aine Stasiewich, Box 3451, Leduc AB T9E 6M2
Calgary Home Eds Encouragement & Resource Society, RR 6, Calgary AB T2M 4L5
Canadian Alliance of Homeschoolers, 272 Hwy #5, RR 1, St George, ON N0E 1N0; 519-448-4001
Canadian Home Educators Assoc of BC, 4684 Darin Ct, Kelowna BC V1W 2B3; 604-764-7462
Community Connections, BJ Smith, 101 Point Dr NW, Calgary AB T3B 5C8
Cowichan Valley Homelearners Support Grp, RR 7, Duncan BC V9L 4W4
Cowichan Valley Christian Homelearners Support Grp, 1050 Marchmont Rd, Duncan BC V9L 2M7
Educare: Homeschooling News, Box 23021, Woodstock ON N4T 1B9
Education Advisory, 2267 Kings Ave, W Vancouver BC V7V 2C1
Greater Vancouver Home Learners Support Grp, 604-228-1939; 604-298-6710
Home Education News, Box 39009 Pt Grey RPO, Vancouver BC V6R 4P1
Home Learning Resource Centre, Box 61, Quathiaski BC V0P 1N0
Home School Legal Defense Assoc of Canada, PO Box 42009, Millbourne PO, Edmonton AB T6K 4C4; 403-986-1566
Homebased Learning Society of Alberta, 8754 Connors Rd, Edmonton AB T6C 4B6; 988-4652
Homeschoolers Assoc of Northern AB, 6311 14 Av, Edmonton AB T6L 1Y1
Manitoba Assoc for Schooling at Home, 89 Edkar Cres, Winnipeg MB R2G 3H8
Montreal Homeschoolers' Support Grp, 5241 Jacques Gremer, Montreal PQ H3W 2G8
Montreal Metropolitan Support Group, website http://www.angelfire.com/mn/nevenfamily/
New Bruns. Assoc of Christian Homeschoolers, RR 1 Site 11 Box 1, Hillsborough NB E0A 1X0; 506-734-2863
Nova Scotia Support Grp, c/o Laura Uhlman RR 1, Pleasantville NS B0R 1G0
Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, 83 Fife Rd, Guelph ON N1H 6X9; 519-763-1150
Ontario Homeschoolers, Box 19, Gilford, ON L0L 1R0; 705-456-3186
Orilla Homeschoolers' Support Grp, 45 Albert St North, Orilla ON L3V 5K3
Quebec Homeschooling Advisory, CP 1278, 1002 Rosemarie, Val David PQ J0T 2N0
Rideau Valley Home Educators Assoc, c/o Duboc, 1144 Byron Av, Ottawa ON K2B 6T4; 613-729-0117

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Saskatchewan Home-Based Educators, 116A Idylwyld Dr. N, suite 13, Saskatoon SK S7L 0Y7
Tri-City Home Learners Network, 604-464-1056 (Port Coquitlan, BC)
Victoria Home Learning Network, 106-290 Regina, Victoria, BC V8Z 6S6
Villa Villekula Homesch'l Resource Grp, 1250 Gladstone Av, Windsor ON N8X 3H3, 519-254-3593
Wondertree Educ Society, Box 38083, Vancouver BC V5Z 4L9, 604-739-5943
Yukon Home Eds' Soc, Box 4963, Whitehorse YT Y1A 4S2

Australia:

Accelerated Christian Education, PO Box 10, Strathpine, Qld., 07 205 7503
Alternative Education Resource Group, PO Box 71, Chirnside Park VIC 3116
Brisbane Homeschooling Group, Lot 2, Caboolture River Rd, Upper Caboolture 4510
Canberra Home Education Network, 23 Bardolph St, Bonython, ACT 2905, 9
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Sunshine Coast Homeschooling Grp, #40 Browns Rd, Belli Park via Edmundi, 4562 Queensland
Yarra Valley Homeschoolers, 9 Salisbury St, Warburton

England:

Education Otherwise, PO Box 7420, London N9 9SG, (tel.) 0891 518303

France:

Homeschooling Bulletin, c/o Sophie Haesen, 7 rue de la Montagne, F-68480 Vieux Ferrette
L'Ecole a la Maison, c/o Nadine Stewart, 6 Grande Rue, F-38660 Le Touvet
Les Enfants D'Abord, c/o Shosha, 4 rue de Lergue, F-34800 Brignac

Ireland:

Sa Bhaile (At Home), Clahane, Ballyard, Tralee, Co. Kerry, 066-26901

Japan:

Otherwise Japan, PO Box Kugayama, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan, email JAB02521@niftyserve.or.jp

Netherlands:

Netherlands Homeschoolers, Raadhuislaan 31, 2131 Hoofddoorp, The Netherlands

New Zealand:

Home Educator's Network of Aotearoa, PO Box 11-645, Ellerslie 1131, Auckland
Homeschooling Federation of NZ, PO Box 41 226, St. Lukes, Auckland
NZ Homesch'ling Assoc, 5 Thanet Av, Mt Albert, Auckland

South Africa:

Nat'l Coalition of Home Schoolers, PO Box 14, Dundee, 3000, tel. 0341 23712, email durham@hadun.dundee.ha.net

Spain:

Crecer Sin Escuela, c/o Szil Norberg, Apartado 45, Alfaz del Pi 03580, Alicante

Other Organizations:

These organizations deal with other educational and child-raising issues that may be of interest to homeschoolers.

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, PO Box 59, E. Chatham NY 12060-0059, 518-392-6900 (deals with public, private, and home schools)
Alternative Education Resource Organization, 417 Roslyn Rd, Roslyn Hghts NY 11577, 516-621-2195
EVAN-G, 977 Keeler Ave, Berkeley CA 94708 (against corporal punishment)
La Leche League International, 1400 N Meacham Rd, PO Box 4079, Schaumberg IL 60168-4079, 1-800-LA LECHE
Liedloff Continuum Network, PO Box 1634, Sausalito CA 94966 (people interested in *The Continuum Concept*)
Nat'l Assoc for the Legal Support of Alt. Schools, PO Box 2823, Santa Fe NM 87501, 505-471-6928
National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), 342 Broadway, Cambridge MA 02139, 617-864-4810
Nat'l Coalition Of Alt. Community Schools, PO Box 15036, Santa Fe NM 87506, 505-474-4312

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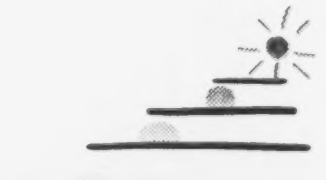

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Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or prescriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a par-ticular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

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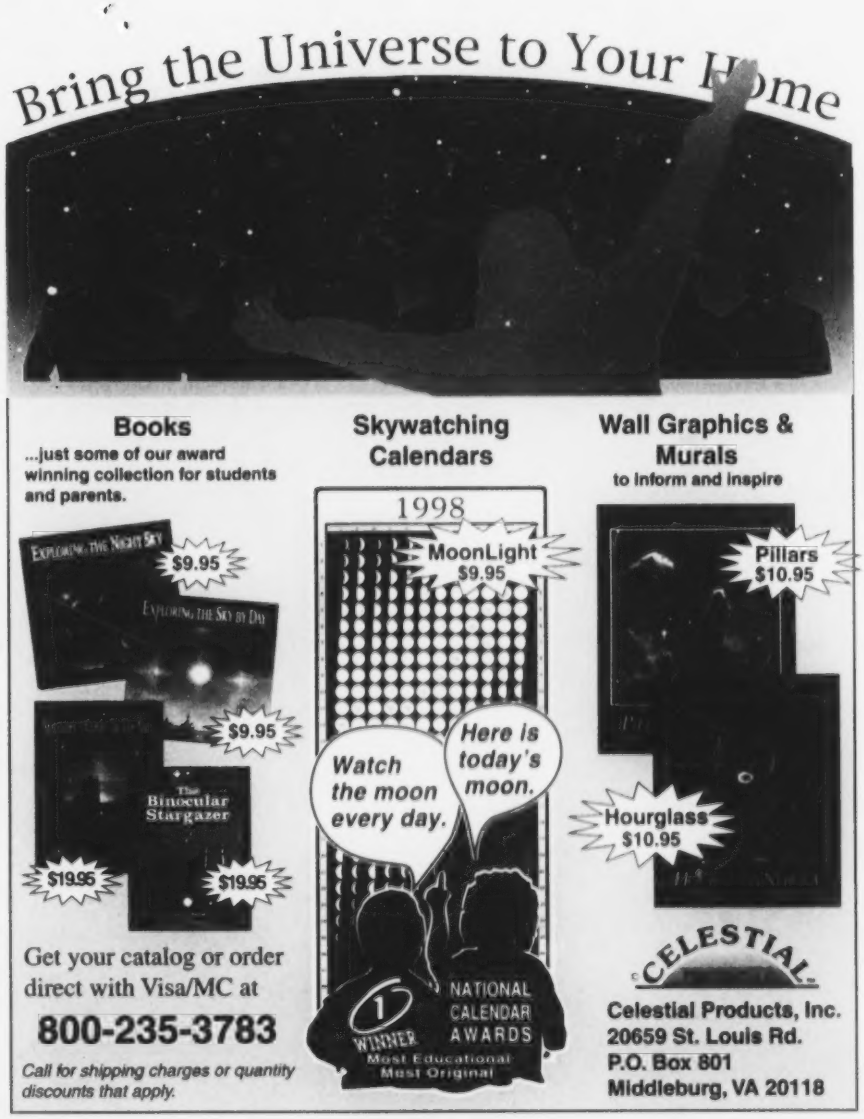

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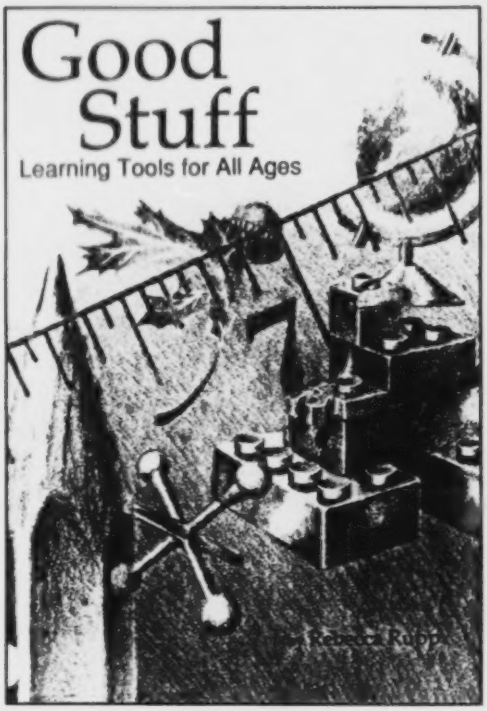

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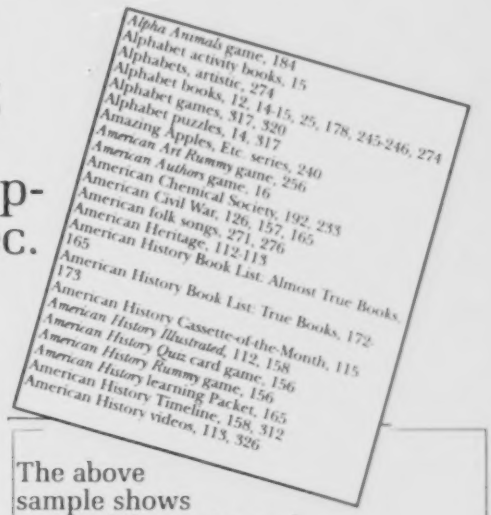
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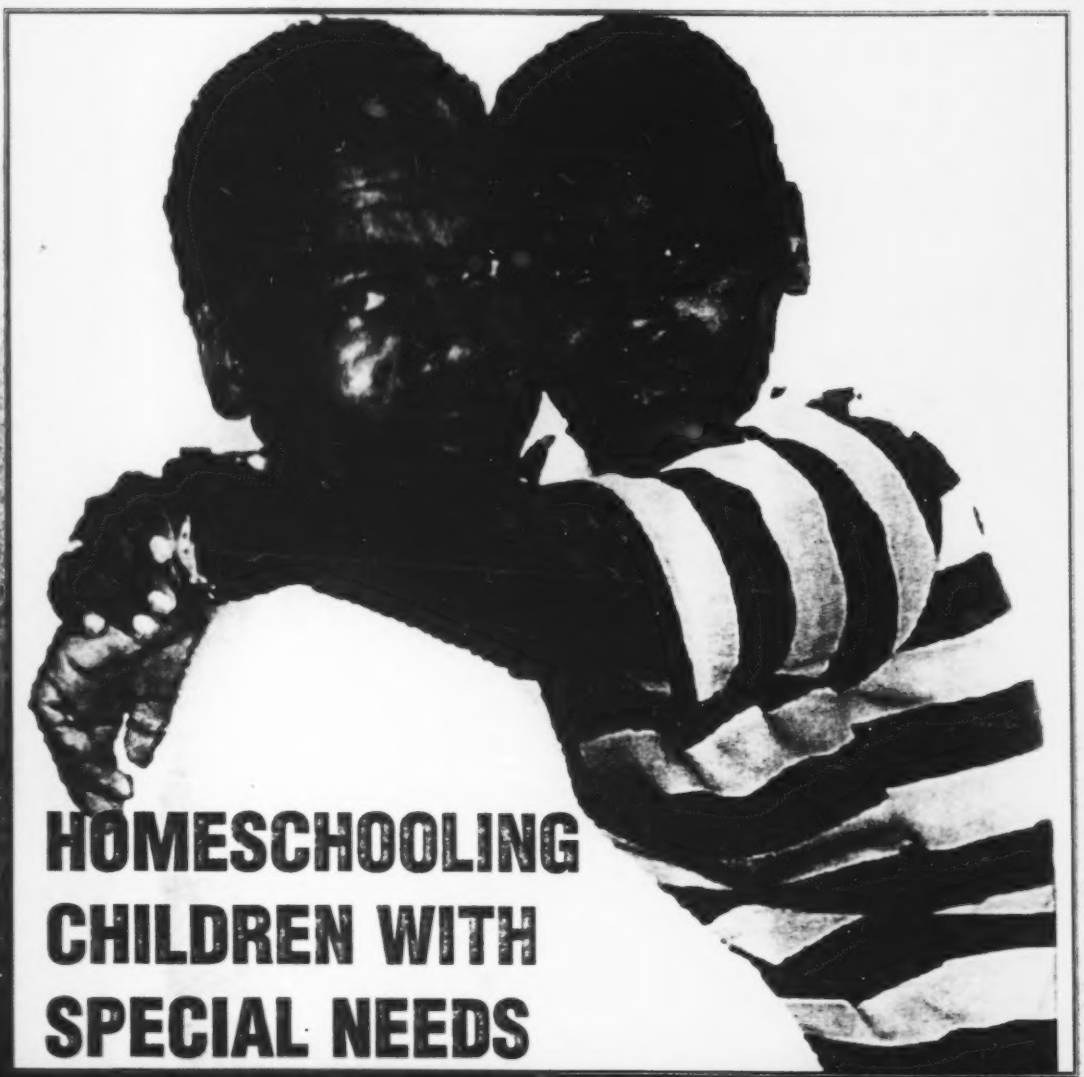
GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

U.S. $6 Issue 121 March/April '98

Making Home a Haven

Trying School

Science Fairs



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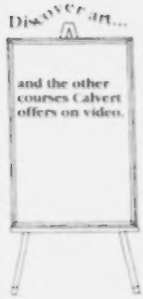

Calvert School offers four video courses. *Discovering Art* is an art appreciation course for students in fourth through eighth grades. Your child will be introduced to the elements of art with plenty of hands-on applications, though the emphasis is on appreciating different styles, not on ensuring that the student becomes an artist. Likewise, *Melody Lane*, our music appreciation course for kindergarten through third grade students, is intended to introduce your child to basic music theory and history, and several instruments, composers, and musicians. Rhythm, melody, and movement are taught, along with many original songs. *Melody Lane* was conceived after we received a positive response to the six music lessons included in our first video venture, *Video Lessons for the First Grade*. Unlike the other independent enrichment courses, this video works in conjunction with and requires enrollment in our First Grade course. It covers six subject areas: art, language arts (including Calvert script), music, mathematics, science, and physical education. The latest project, *Come Read With Me*, is an imaginative, self-paced, interactive reading course for emerging readers, pre-kindergarten through first grade. The lessons and video quality are of the highest caliber. See for yourself why Calvert has been a leader in home instruction for more than 90 years.

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GWS

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By John Holt

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In this issue

Homeschooling children with special needs is like homeschooling any children, only more so. That's the feeling I get from the two moving and inspiring stories in this issue's Focus. For example:

Most homeschoolers have received skeptical glances at one time or another for suggesting that they can teach their own kids; parents of kids with special needs often receive outright shock and condemnation for suggesting the same thing.

Many parents turn to homeschooling only after trying for a considerable time to get what they want from school; parents of children with special needs tell of some of the most difficult and protracted struggles of this kind.

Most beginning homeschoolers wonder if they'll be able to help their children learn but then remind themselves how much learning their children have already done at home; parents of kids with special needs have had to work with their child directly and intensively for so long that the realization that they've already been homeschooling hits them even more forcefully.

Rare is the homeschooling parent who hasn't wondered, on a bad day, if all the socialization arguments have some merit; parents of kids with special needs can feel that it's difficult for their kids to find friends under any circumstances. As Wendy Renish points out in this issue, "We don't have the kind of child that makes neighbors want to come over and help out. So sending a child to school can feel like a respite."

Not sending kids to school is in some sense a challenge to the entire community, and kids with special needs make this challenge even more vivid: if we're not going to use schools as the respite, the support, the place parents can turn when they feel they can't do it all, will other people step in to fill that gap? Can parents of children with special needs rely not just on institutional support but on the support of friends or neighbors or others in the community?

This question of how the community is challenged when some choose not to rely on school comes up in another feature in this issue: the stories about homeschoolers trying school. These stories continue the discussion raised in our last issue about how long-time homeschoolers come to choose homeschooling for themselves. They also reveal exactly how absurd, disconnected, and antithetical to true learning or seriousness of purpose school's demands can be. Whenever I hear stories like this, I always want to say, "School reform movement, listen up!" But, as I said, such stories are not only addressed to schools. Alec Young (in this issue) decided that, ultimately, full-time enrollment wasn't worth it to him even though he had dreamed of playing on the school's basketball team. In walking back out the door and joining a non-school team, he was saying, in effect, that he was going to trust that the community outside school's walls could give him the support and opportunities he desired. People often grow, often become their best selves, when others challenge them to respond in new ways. Perhaps the same is true of communities.

— Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Access to School Sports in Connecticut

An article in the 1/4/98 *Boston Globe*, headlined "Homeschooling dispute flares over sports", describes a Connecticut homeschooling family's efforts to gain access to the school's basketball team for their 14-year-old daughter: "Donald Robertson said the homeschooling was going smoothly until Laura outgrew the local recreation department's basketball program. But when her parents tried to enroll her on the high school basketball team, school officials said she was not allowed to play.

"Anthony Mosa, assistant executive director of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference, the state's governing body for high school athletics, says students who participate in athletics must adhere to the school's academic and behavioral rules, and it would be impossible to enforce such rules with children who are homeschooled. For instance, student athletes in any public school in the state must pass a minimum of four courses (English, math, science, and history) and have a good attendance record. 'There is no way to know if the homeschooled student is living up to those standards,' Mosa said. 'There cannot be a group of rules for some students and another set for other students.'

"Mosa says it wouldn't be fair to students who attend school to be displaced by a nonstudent. 'If a student who does not attend the school wants to play sports, then a student who does attend the school may lose her spot on the team,' Mosa said. 'Is that right?'

"The Robertsons believe their children should be entitled to the same activities as any other child since their tax dollars assist in financing such programs as athletics. ... Milford Superintendent of Schools Mary Jo Kramer disagrees. She points out that there are many city-financed programs where people must meet certain criteria in order to participate. 'We all pay taxes but we can't just decide one day we want to receive the same benefits as senior citizens,' Kramer said."

"Laura Robertson says she is beginning to realize that the only way she may be able to play ball is to attend high school. 'I don't want to go to school,' she said. 'I like learning at home but I would consider it if it were the only way I could play basketball.'"

In the January/February 1998 issue of *HearthNotes*, the newsletter of the Connecticut Home Educators Association, Laura's parents, Donald and Beatrice Robertson, write that they are seeking to petition the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference to change their bylaws so that homeschoolers are eligible to play on public school teams. The family met with the CIAC in December and presented a petition with 500 signatures. The CIAC didn't make any decision at that meeting but, as we go to press, they are in the process of meeting with school superintendents around Connecticut about this issue. Meanwhile, homeschooling families in Connecticut are collecting information about various school district's policies regarding homeschoolers' participation in extra-curricular activities and are writing letters to the CIAC addressing some of the concerns stated above. For example, homeschoolers argue that academic standards could easily be assessed based on the student's individual course of study and that homeschoolers do not contribute to disorderly conduct in school.

For a personal account of a homeschooling teenager's struggle with whether to enroll in school in order to play basketball, see "Trying School," p. 9.

Homeschooling in Advice Columns

[SS:] Many readers have seen, and sent us, copies of the Dear Abby columns about homeschooling that appeared during the late summer and fall. (First a reader wrote a letter critical of homeschooling, then Abby invited homeschooled children to respond, and several did, then other parents and teachers wrote to raise further objections.)

Meanwhile, advice column discussion of homeschooling continued, this time in Dr. T. Berry Brazelton's syndicated column, "Your Child's Health." A parent wrote to Dr. Brazelton saying she planned to homeschool her 9-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter because she felt she could do a better job academically, but she was somewhat bothered by what they would miss out on socially. She asked Dr. Brazelton for his opinion, and he replied, "Home schooling may be a substitute for the public school system for intellectual pursuits, but it isn't one for learning how to live with one's peers. ... Learning how to live with, suffer with, and cope with one's peers is a very important asset in our society today. ... I guess I'm more concerned than you are about isolating them." Brazelton went on to say that a parent who wanted to "add [her] mark" to her children's intellectual development could do it during families activities at home on the weekends.

Many GWS readers sent us a copy of this column and several sent us copies of their written responses. One reader suggested that we at GWS telephone Dr. Brazelton, which we did. In the brief conversation that followed, it was apparent that Dr. Brazelton had no particular axe to grind about homeschooling but was unfamiliar with it and had offered an answer based on what he imagined would be the case for homeschooled children. We followed up by sending him sample GWS issues and other information, and in a later column, Brazelton printed letters from home-schooling parents, information about GWS, and his own reply:

"My answer to the question about homeschooling unleashed a wealth of responses from readers. I have been educated by those who were not satisfied with my reply. I expressed concern about whether a child educated at home would have enough opportunities for socialization. Many readers

assured me that families who homeschool are likely to be prepared for this. They make efforts to band together and to see to it that their children meet one another, participate in sports, and attend social and recreational events. They are sophisticated and enterprising about ensuring such opportunities. When this is the case, I am not concerned."

Both these advice column exchanges show that if, when people express concerns about homeschool-ing, we can respond with a tone that conveys something like, "I can understand how you might worry about that if you were unfamiliar with what homeschoolers actually do and what opportunities are actually available, but here is some information to help you become more familiar with this option," people *can* absorb the information and alter their stance.

Office News

[PF:] Homeschooling continues to grow impressively; the most recent estimate by Dr. Pat Lines of the Federal Department of Education is 629,000 homeschooled children in the 1995-96 school year, nearly triple the number she estimated just five years earlier. The temptation to regulate homeschooling is growing, too, and as part of the homeschooling community's efforts to counter that trend, we are working on ways to further our outreach to homeschoolers and to let the general public know that homeschooling is self-selecting, self-correcting, a good way to learn, and does not need to be standardized into school-at-home. We are trying some new ideas and appreciate any feedback you can give us:

• Our website is going to be upgraded in the coming months. We will be adding more written materials, such as articles we've written and the text of speeches we've given and monthly postings from GWS archives. Our website will now be linked to CompuServe so that visitors can come and go freely between CompuServe's homeschooling offerings and the websites of groups, like us, that participate. Contact Compuserve for more information: 800-848-8990.

• The video of the John Holt tribute from our 20th anniversary conference is now available! It sells for $14.95 + $5 shipping. We expect to have a tape of the Grown Homeschoolers panel available later this year. We are fortunate to have homeschoolers in our area, Bonnie and Russ Silva, who are television producers and who have generously donated their time to both productions. We hope you will be able to share these tapes with your extended family, your support groups, or even your local cable TV access chanel.

• Speaking of cable TV access, homeschooling father Ned Vare, of Connecticut, has been making TV shows that support homeschooling and other alternatives to public school and airing them through his local community cable access channel. Ned came to our office and asked me to "redeliver" a speech I had presented at Fitchburg State College for their Alternative Education Day in 1994. Frankly, I look forward to someday creating a more dynamic video about unschooling than this one, but Ned convinced me that 48 minutes of a talking head is par for the course for local community channels and that we have to start somewhere. Ned edited the speech so that it can be aired without running afoul of any cable TV regulations. Ned has already aired it locally; others around the country can do the same thing by puchasing a copy of the tape, "Learning is Not the Same as Schooling," from us for $11.

• Finally, we have updated and are now in our second printing of the book *And What About College.* See "Calendar," below, for Cafi Cohen's speaking schedule this year.

[SS:] We are in the beginning stages of planning our 1998 conference: a one-day event to be held in Massachusetts in August or September, with a keynote, workshops, discussions, and networking for adults, children, and teens; vendors; optional tours and receptions. You'll see more info in the next GWS, and now is the time to write to us about what or who you want to see there.

We're also in the middle of some temporary staff changes, and we want to let you know who is currently handling what in the office so that you'll know whom to contact. Robin Rosiello handles inquiries regarding GWS subscriptions; Dawn Lease and Day Farenga will be coordinating our 1998 conference, and Day, who is cutting down on her office hours to spend more time with her family, will for the next couple of months be acting as a consultant for the many areas of our work with which she has experience. Day will still be handling our participation as vendors or exhibitors at conferences around the country, so you may direct inquiries to her.

Calendar

March 28, 1998: Maryland Home Education Association regional conference in Annapolis, MD. Cafi Cohen speaking; Holt Associates book table. For info: Manfred Smith, 410-730-0073.

April 4: S. California Homeschool Conference at Cal. State University, Long Beach, CA. Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Lenore Hayes, 562-434-3940.

May 1-2: Wisconsin Parents Assoc. 15th annual Home Education Conference at the University Center in Stevens Pt, WI. For info: Melissa Rice, 715-341-6378 or WPA, 608-283-3131 or write WPA, PO Box 2502, Madison WI 53701-2502.

May 9: "Happily Homeschooling Older Kids" at Great Books in Lakewood, CO. Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Cindy Stanley, 303-341-2242.

May 21-22: Florida Parent-Educators Assoc at the Hyatt Hotel, Orlando, FL. Pat Farenga speaking. For info: Dave Exley, 407-722-0895.

May 22-25: Rethinking Education conferece in Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX. Cafi Cohen speaking; Holt Associates book table. For info: Sarah Jordan, 817-430-4835.

May 30-31: Clonlara Home Based Education Program in Toledo, OH. Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: 415-769-4515 or carmen9@idt.net

June 12-14: The Link Homeschooling Conference in Southern CA. Cafi Cohen, Pat Farenga speaking. For info: Mary Leppert, 805-492-1373.

August 15: Homeschooling for Everyone, by the Rocky Mtn Education Connection, at Teikyo Loretto Hts University in Denver, CO. David & Micki Colfax, Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Cindy Stanley, 303-341-2242.

Homeschoolers' *Science Fairs*

Bears, Burglar Alarms, Optical Illusions, and More!

David Mantell (NY) writes:

The plans for a Rochester Area Homeschoolers Association Science Fair were made at the GWS conference this past summer when, inspired by the science fair there, a few of us from Rochester made plans to hold our own fair in the fall. My initial idea for a fair had come from a presentation on Math Fairs I'd seen at a regional meeting of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics here in Rochester. Ever since, I've wanted to do a math fair with our group, but I figured that a Science Fair would help set the stage.

At RAHA's September picnic potluck meeting, we passed out flyers announcing the fair for the October meeting. Basically a reminder for the refrigerator door, the flyer included topic ideas – some serious (moon, mars, meteors, and mushrooms) and some whimsical (how a cow's stomach works) – just to get folks thinking. Of course, no one used my suggestions – they picked things like Black Holes, volcanoes, and ferrets – so I still don't know how a cow's stomach works. The flyer also included some open-ended instructions and a request to call with exhibit titles a week ahead so that I could make up an official-looking program listing the exhibitors' names and topics. I thought it would be fun for the participants to see their names in print, and the Science Fair program could also serve as a record of the event for parents to put in portfolios or to use when preparing quarterly reports (required in New York State).

I wasn't sure how many projects we'd get, and most of the calls came within a day or two of the deadline. I was thrilled by the response: fourteen projects, including Photoluminescence, Insects, Adirondaks Ecosystem (a terrarium), Trees in Our Yard, Yeast, Molds and Other Fungi. In our house, we spent the week before the fair working intensely on Sarah's Optical Illusions and Eli's Magnetism projects. One father told me that their whole month's activities (not just science) had been inspired by their projects: Inside Paper and Sound and Vibration. One the day of the meeting, even more kids showed up with six additional projects, including Bears, Burglar Alarms, Fair Water, Soap (homemade), and Freezing Point Depression (demonstrated while making sorbet for all to sample – I went back for thirds just to be sure I understood all the principles involved). We held the fair in the meeting room that a local church lets our group use for meetings, and we did have to scramble to find space for everybody, but we all joked that because it was a homeschooling science fair, breaking the rules, such as bringing a project at the last moment, was perfectly acceptable.

There really wasn't any particular set of expectations for presentations; after all, participants ranged in age from 5 to 15. There was no judging or awarding of prizes. Many of the projects included hands-on demos, such as a Corn Starch experiment in which you put your fingers in wet corn starch and a "gun" made from a straw that used compressed air to fire little potato bullets. Some of the kids stood by explaining their work, while others let their posters do most of the explaining. Parents helped some of the younger ones answer questions, and one resourceful presenter put questions and answers on a cassette tape so she could go around the room looking at other projects.

I had expected to supervise the event more actively, but that didn't seem necessary when the time came. The room was instantly full of adults and kids milling around, trying out experiments, reading posters, and talking about science. It turned out to be as good a mixer as it was a Science Fair! The event was deemed a huge success, and there was a lot of enthusiasm for more fairs at future meetings. My daughter volunteered to organize a History Fair next, so my Math Fair will have to wait until spring.

There are, I suppose, a lot of formal reasons why such an event is good for the children's education: working to complete a project and meet a deadline, demonstrating their work, seeing other examples of similar work, discussing science with new people, and perhaps stimulating new ideas for future projects. But what made the Science Fair especially gratifying for all of us was the authenticity of the participants' enthusiasm about their topics and the opportunity to share what they had learned – prompted by their own desire to be part of a community event, free of competition and external rewards. So often we struggle to explain what we love about unschooling and how our children have a way of exceeding any expectations that might have been imposed on them in a more structured setting. It's a tricky thing to get across to someone unaccustomed to trusting children. The Science Fair demonstrated some of that magic better than our words ever could.

Mixing Ages and Interests at the Library

Phoebe Wells (MA) writes:

One day last November I stood in the lecture hall of my local library with the most amazing things going on around me. Small plastic animals were being catapulted in the front of the room, paper airplanes whizzed along the back, rocks containing zinc glowed

under a black light along one side and on the other a homemade machine measured friction next to a large display of leaf rubbings. And that was not all. Elsewhere there were microscopes, mystery foods to taste, and a boy discussing extra-terrestrial life while his sister presented intra-terrestrial life, otherwise known as worm composting. What was going on in this usually quiet place? A homeschoolers' science fair, of course!

This was our group's fourth science fair in a year, and possibly the most amazing part to me is how such a successful event could be created with so little prep work. Another mother originally had the idea, and together we began to envision the type of science fair we'd like: open to all ages, projects of all levels of complexity (including "unfinished" or ongoing ones), and absolutely no competition or even awards for participation. We wanted this to be a fun, informal, and no-pressure way to share whatever science-y thing kids and their families had been working on or even just messing around with.

Choosing a site was easy because the Cambridge Public Library had already told me they would be interested in practically any program we wanted to put on as long as it would be open to the public. They had a few obvious stipulations (no fire, loud noise, mess, etc.), but otherwise were very happy to sponsor a homeschoolers' science fair.

We announced our science fair ideas in our local homeschooling group's newsletter, and about 10 families responded. I kept track of the number of projects to make sure we had enough table space (a few people brought folding tables because the library didn't have enough). I made a list of topics too so that the librarians could make a display of books relating to our projects. We publicized our fair in our newsletter and in the library's calendar of events. In addition, the librarians and I agreed to schedule the fair to overlap with one of their after-school storytimes, which helped to ensure an audience.

That first science fair was a great success. Kids aged 4 to 12 presented 12 very different projects to a total audience of about 60 people, and

Adrian Rigopulos (right) marvels at Fred Sayigh's SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Inelligence) project

every library book on display was borrowed that day. Some projects were very simple, like fossil collection and magnet games, some were very complex, like a Rube Goldberg-style machine and a depiction of the geology and zoology of the Earth in 200 million years, and most were in between: electricity, crystals, a model solar system, bones, pulleys, a robot, healthy food, and dancing raisins (Alka Seltzer is the secret ingredient). The young scientists were all very excited and enthusiastic, and one mother told me afterward that the atmosphere was a lot more like a party than a conventional science fair.

The feedback I received was that everybody wanted more science fairs, so I planned two more the following March and June, with some changes in format. I decided to make the fairs shorter so the young ones wouldn't get so tired out and the older ones could make it to other scheduled activities more easily. Since we would no longer overlap with the library's storytime, I publicized the fair to nearby homeschooling groups to generate more audience.

I scheduled the March fair a week after the Odyssey of the Mind regional competition so that the second-place winning homeschooling team could do a special presentation of their "cat and mouse" vehicles equipped with different power sources and plenty of pins to pop balloons as they traveled a designated course. In addition, we had kids aged 4 to 14, the young ones presenting mobius strips, gravity, a crystal radio, simple chemical reactions, a model laser, and biodegradable packaging, while the older kids displayed skeletons, rock candy, a solar-powered waterfall, trajectories, and evidence that dinosaurs were warm-blooded.

The June fair was quite small, with only five families presenting and even fewer visiting as audience. Our young scientists were disappointed at first until we decided that we would all go as a group to each person's exhibit. As fellow presenters, we fully appreciated each other's projects, from the younger kids' displays of the four seasons, clouds, and birds, to the older kids' projects on genetics, falcons, and a special Ask-the-Animal-Expert

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http://www.home-school-village.com

session with an aspiring zoologist. To make this fair a bit more festive before the summer holidays, we planned a potluck dinner afterward outside on the library lawn.

Now, having thrown four of these science fairs, I believe what will work best for us is just two fairs per year: one in November and the other shortly after the Odyssey of the Mind competition in the spring. We'll limit them to three hours, and the librarians would prefer that we schedule them on school early-release days to make them more accessible to non-homeschoolers. They know they can count on our fairs to generate brisk business on the science shelves. Some parents have suggested that we plan other types of events, too, such as history/biography fairs, art exhibits, collection shows, and general project fairs. Neither of my kids has been very receptive to these ideas, but I'm hopeful that other parents will give them a try.

In addition to being amazed at just how easy it's been to organize these science fairs, I have been very impressed with how well the mix of ages and types of projects has worked. Older kids often gave encouraging tips to the younger ones, and the younger ones were typically rapt admirers of the more complex projects. I also found it interesting that several kids changed their topics shortly before a fair. My son Daire did this once. After spending weeks planning his poster of clouds, as soon as it was completed, all he wanted to do was make puppets. He surprised me by the morning of the fair by announcing that he had made a full set of weather puppets as part of his project (puppets representing clouds, sun, lightning, etc.).

One thing these fairs have made me notice is how differently my two kids approach science. Daire would happily turn out weekly or even daily science fair projects if he could, yet when we're at the fair, he quickly abandons his own display and spends all his time examining everyone else's projects. Eoin, on the other hand, is usually only mildly interested in science unless a fair is coming up. Because the fairs are, to him, another opportunity to perform (something he loves), he tries to choose projects where he can actively demonstrate something, like the aerodynamics of various paper airplanes. Consequently, he often ends up not seeing much of other people's projects. Also, Daire's fair projects are usually the result of something he's been studying anyway for a long time. Eoin, however, tends to use a fair as a resaon to begin to research something he's been curious about but never took the time to explore.

I've been impressed with the originality and creativity of all the kids' projects, especially compared to the dull stuff usually recommended in science fair project books. It's just so gratifying to see a room full of young scientists, experts in their chosen fields for at least that fair, eager to share their discoveries and enthusiasm with you. ◆

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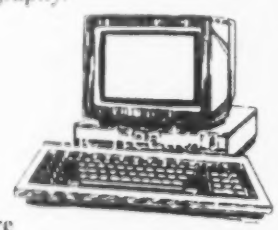

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Trying School

Enrolling to Play on the Basketball Team

Ronder Thomas Young (GA) writes:

A few years ago a reporter putting together a local television feature on homeschooling came by our house to talk to us and tape, he said, whatever we should happen to be doing at the time. My oldest son, William, happened to be weaving a small tapestry that he'd begun the day before at a friend's house. Although weaving was something that we'd all been exploring for a while, through books and trial and error, this friend was more accomplished and had answered our accumulated questions.

The reporter asked William, "So this is art class?"

William angled the loom to give him a better look. "It's a tapestry," he said.

The man nodded. "I see," he said. "Who taught you how to do that?"

"A friend of my mom's," William said.

"And what do you learn from that?" the reporter asked him.

William shook his head and looked at the camera pointed in his direction. He didn't understand the question, and, frankly, neither did I.

The reporter squatted beside William and suggested what he might have learned. Laying out those patterns, perhaps, might involve math.

William shook his head. "She taught us how to join colors," he said.

The reporter smiled and stood up. It was clear he'd already decided that bit wouldn't survive the first edit, which was unfortunate, as William had in that brief exchange revealed the very heart of our everyday learning process – specificity.

When William's designs grew more sophisticated than his skills, he sought the specific knowledge he needed to execute them. In the same manner, Alec never sat down in isolation and learned to write an outline; when one of his history papers grew larger than usual, we worked together to see how using an outline as a plan could make the process less cumbersome and intimidating. My sons' grasp of grammar, vocabulary and narrative forms evolved naturally from their voracious reading and careful revision of their own writing. Although we all frequently, informally and formally, discuss our short-term and long-term goals in life and learning, specific skills and knowledge are usually acquired in response to a specific need that arises in the course of doing specific work.

This year our process was somewhat interrupted when, after a lifetime of homeschooling, my fourteen year-old, Alec, enrolled in high school because of a keen interest in playing on the school basketball team. I'm sure you'll hear more about this experience because when he dragged himself in after the second day, he declared, "I'm writing to *Growing Without Schooling* about this." By the end of the second week, he'd decided that his exit was imminent, but he's trying to give it enough time to make a measured and deliberate decision. "No basketball team is worth living like this," he's decided.

Those two weeks had been difficult for me, too, for a number of reasons, but primarily because of a complete lack of specificity, except in their arbitrary, state legislated regulations, in the school system. Without exception, adults in the system seem to respond to either Alec's or my question in terms of how what Alec does today will affect his life four or more years from now. After his first Biology quiz, the teacher graded them by sticking the completed tests into a machine. When Alec, surprised that he'd missed anything on this rather simplistic, multiple choice test, asked her what answers had been incorrect, she assured him that his grade was fine, but that there would be many opportunities to bring it up if he was concerned. It did not occur to her – and she didn't have the time, apparently, to understand – that Alec was interested, not in his final grade, but in the possibility that he'd misunderstood some key concepts.

When Alec expressed concern about the content of his Algebra text, class, and a so-called "placement" test, which consisted of five hand-written, obtuse questions, I spoke to his math teacher to be sure that this was the best the school had to offer. She evaded my specific questions and insisted that with the math that he was getting he would have no problem getting into Georgia Tech or engineering schools in or out of the state. Ironically, neither I nor Alec had ever mentioned any ambition of engineering schools – Alec, at this point, plans to major in art if he goes to college – but apparently she assumed that was the only reason he or I would care about math. The conversations I've had with every one of these professional educators – from principals to office secretaries – have followed the same line. What my son is doing with his life today only has value as far as where it will place him four years from now – and in their school and state statistics. It's difficult to communicate with these people who don't appreciate the need for dignity and depth in young people's day to day lives. It reveals a profound disrespect for their very existence.

I think that Alec assumed before he went to school that the main difference between homeschooling and traditional schooling would be standards, with a few logistical difficulties thrown in, and, if that was the case, he could fill in the gaps. However, he's discovered that it's not that simple. Even his so-called honors classes are unconcerned with content and meaningful work. In Social Studies, instead of reading the first two sections, pondering them critically and perhaps making pertinent notes, the students had to formally outline the sections and turn the outline in so that it could be graded. When and where would anyone ever do such a thing? The skill is so disconnected

from its point of potential usefulness in the process, that it's no wonder it's not absorbed. The work has no meaning.

In the honors English class the students read the first act of "The Miracle Worker" in the first week, but even though they've received a few dictatorial pronouncements to be placed in their notes, no class time has been given to discussion of the play. Instead, the students, were instructed to go through the play, find unfamiliar words, and write about them following a Byzantine, 12-point guide. This teacher has the reputation as a tough teacher because of her scornful, slashing way of grading, but upon reflection, Alec says that there had, so far, been no teaching. She had not demonstrated what she wanted, taking a sample work and putting it through her particular process, yet she insulted the students for not reading her mind. She ridiculed their analogies, yet Alec realized she'd not once been given a random word and created an analogy herself. He became less intimidated, at least to the point, that when she declared that one of his words "was not even a word," he opened a dictionary and showed it to her. And he successfully argued that the words "flanked" and "surrounded" did not mean precisely the same thing, as she insisted. His winning an argument, however, did not mean she conceded the point, or even discussed it, but that she was willing to "give" him a point on his grade.

Does anyone remember "The Miracle Worker" by now? And schools lament students who don't read! At home Alec would have been reading fiction and nonfiction every day, stopping to look up the meaning of a word when necessary. Yet in this so-called honors English class they've done no more reading. This class would be more aptly defined as a poorly conceived SAT-prep class, which again reveals the school's true concern, that when these freshman are encouraged to take the SAT next year, the district will be happy with their 1998 average scores, which will scream from the headlines.

The only conclusions I can draw from what I've seen is that these educators do not trust the natural process of learning – in which case they should not hold such control over children's lives – and they do not trust the SAT to accurately assess whatever learning has taken place – in which case they should relieve the SAT of its significance rather that contorting their curriculum to fit it.

I will continue to give my full attention to Alec's specific questions, projects and learning. I will, as always, trust his assessment of what is meaningful work. I refuse, however, to spend my days running through the bureaucratic mazes and jumping through arbitrary hoops. And I will encourage him to do the same. When Alec decided to try high school, he said, "I'll always be a homeschooler, no matter where I am." And I suppose the onus is on me to remember that I'll always be a homeschooling parent, no matter where my children are.

Ronder wrote a few weeks later:

I wrote to you in a fit of frustration after the second week of school. By the end of the third week, Alec was convinced that the overall dysfunction and incoherence of the system overwhelmed the occasional good moments. He spent the weekend grappling with the idea of "being a quitter" and giving up his opportunity to play high school basketball before he'd even had a chance to try out. On Monday morning, he asked me to take him over so that he could withdraw. Going around and getting each teacher's signature and comments was another emotional hurdle, but after a couple of hours he walked out of the school and breathed a huge sigh of relief.

One of the most interesting things I observed about Alec's first couple of post-school weeks was an almost compulsive need to draw and paint. Alec has always been an active artist, but, except for his pottery, had not pursued his art as persistently last year. Perhaps the constrictions of school awakened this need, or, perhaps, he just more keenly appreciated the time and freedom homeschooling gave him, now that he'd seen the alternative. Whatever triggered this surge of creativity, it was exciting to observe.

With hindsight, I can say that this school experience was a good one. Education is, obviously, a frequent topic of conversation for us, but it is sometimes difficult to understand the absurdity, inequity, and destruction that permeate schooling without being caught in the middle of it. The brief experience sharpened not only Alec's personal focus and priorities but his social consciousness as well. Despite his own personal unhappiness in school, Alec clearly saw that he was one of a small group of very lucky ones in the system. Just sitting in the guidance office and listening to the very different questions asked of and choices offered to different students was enlightening.

Alec has distinguished himself in basketball since he was quite young, with his talent, commitment, and pure love of the sport. Although he's played in community leagues, attended numerous camps, and last year played for an AAU team for the first time, he's always believed that playing for a high school team was an essential component of his development. Now, all things considered, he's adjusting that view. This week he tried out for and made a homeschool team that plays in a division of small private high schools. If he had gone this route without at least trying school, I think he would have considered it a lesser choice. With his new insight, however, he's embracing the opportunity.

Alec Young adds his perspective:

When I decided to attend public high school for the first time, I didn't think it would be as difficult as it turned out to be. I knew, from talking with my friends who attend school, that subjects would be covered in a lot less depth than in my independent study, but I didn't think that would be too much of a problem; I assumed that I could do what school expected of me and still continue learning in the same way I had been. I immediately saw that this would not be possible, however, because of the schedule school imposed on my life.

From 7:30 unti 12:30 I attended six classes that lasted less than an hour each. Most of this time was spent

discussing what would be on upcoming tests and what supplies we needed for future projects, and explaining homework assignments. I don't remember one actual discussion on any subject during the three weeks I attended school. In the past, when I had seen how simple my friends' homework assignments were, I had thought homework would not take that long to complete. The truth is, busywork takes just as long to complete as real work – especially when you multiply it by six courses – so I often didn't finish my homework until 11:00 in the evening. It wasn't the time spent on schoolwork that frustrated me, but rather the time wasted.

In my second week at school, I presented a "personal time-line" in history class. We had been told to show, in a one-page paper, visually and orally, what we saw as the main events of our past and what we presumed would be the main events of our future. Since my last name is "Young," and students presented in alphabetical order, I had the advantage of sitting through most of the presentations before mine was due. Although some of the visual presentations were executed well, I was struck by how alike these time-lines were. Even though mine took a different track, the teacher liked it very much and asked a lot of questions. It hit me later that some of the things on my time-line that interested the teacher and the class the most, such as my raku pottery, would never have been possible if I'd been in school. I'd had to spend concentrated hours at the pottery studio at the arts center, going in every morning in order to work on my sculptures at just the right point. The requirements of the school schedule would never have allowed me to rearrange my priorities and work to meet the needs of a particular project the way homeschooling did.

The next week we were given an almost identical assignment in English, only this time it was a "self-portrait," which we were to present in a one-page paper, again visually and orally. Our teacher encouraged us to be creative. Most of the students pressed her for details on what exactly she wanted us to do and how exactly she wanted us to do it. Then she gave out a long list of guidelines that included things such as "What foods do you like to eat?" and "What clothes do you like to wear?" This seemed to satisfy most of the class. I puzzled over the list for a while, but decided to take the teacher at her word: she had said she wanted us to be creative and to communicate who we were to her. The questions on the list, I decided, should be used as points of departure.

I didn't want to just rearrange and repeat my history project, so instead of a poster-type visual, I went into my father's studio at work and edited together a video following my evolution as a visual artist and basketball player. Since I was allowed only a few minutes and one page to present who I was to the class, I thought that revealing my greatest passions, art and basketball, and how I had pursued them from an early age, was the best way for me to do it.

Once again, my alphabetic advantage allowed me to sit through most of the presentations before my own. This time the offerings were even less diverse than those in the history class, and I was the only one who took the teacher's guidelines as a point of departure as opposed to following them literally. By the time my name was called, I knew the favorite food and clothes designer of most of the kids, but I didn't really know *them.*

My video was a hit just because it was different. My teacher really liked it and continued to talk to me about it after class. Her only complaint was a vague one – that she would have liked it to be more complete. After questioning her further, I realized what she meant was that I hadn't answered enough of the questions on her list. Those other kids hadn't been stupid for insisting on those guidelines; they knew that what was important was figuring out exactly what the teacher wanted and giving it to her. Still, my teacher insisted, she really loved what I had done. What I realized later, and what she didn't seem to realize at all, was that I couldn't do both – couldn't do the creative video *and* answer all her questions. Not in one page and five minutes.

After three miserable weeks, I was

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beginning to realize that I couldn't do both in a broader sense: I couldn't learn at the level I was accustomed to and go to school, too. It was as if there was a big wall keeping me from learning the material when I was in school. When I read my biology assignments, I was always scrambling to complete pages and pages of fill-in-the-blanks study guides instead of thinking about the material. The teacher said these worksheets were her way of making sure we read the material, but, in fact, the volume of this busywork kept me from actually reading and comprehending the material. At home, I had always read fiction, but when we read the play "The Miracle Worker" in English, I was scrambling to find the required number of vocabulary words from each act for my vocabulary notebook. We discussed the vocabulary words in class, but we never discussed the meaning of the play. Learning had always been the top priority in my life before, but I now saw that learning was not the top priority in high school. So if I stayed in school, it seemed I wouldn't be learning and doing as much. No basketball team was worth that.

I took a day off to clear my head and think things through. I knew I could adjust to the way things were in school and survive there, but I didn't have to, and I didn't want to. I decided to quit school before basketball tryouts were even held. The idea of quitting was difficult enough, but if I waited around until I'd joined a team, I knew I wouldn't quit a team, no matter how miserable I was in school, because that would mean breaking a commitment. Just quitting school, on the other hand, I saw as returning a faulty product and getting on with my life.

Still, it wasn't easy. I had to go around the next morning and get signatures from all my teachers. The basketball coach, who was also my Health teacher, said he would miss having me on his team (he'd seen me play at open gym). The Biology teacher threatened me with a lower final grade since I'd been absent the day before and therefore had not turned in the last assignment; when she saw it didn't matter to me which number she put down, she gave me my rightful grade. The Algebra teacher who, ironically, was the only teacher I saw as incompetent, gave me a lecture about how homeschooling could not prepare me as well as school. My History and English teachers talked to me for quite a while and seemed truly concerned about understanding my decision.

Walking out of the school when all the forms had been filled out, however, was not hard. I'd felt as if I'd been smothering for three weeks and, all of a sudden, I could breathe again. And draw and read and think again.

And play on a basketball team. I tried out for, and made, a homeschool basketball team that competes in a league with small private schools.

Going for a Day

Gail Nagasako (HI) sent us a copy of an article she wrote for a local newsletter, Home's Cool Gazette:

This past March, Thumper (13) went on a field trip to school, his first time ever in school. He has been unschooled all his life, with bodyboarding and rollerblading his main activities and with abundant field trips and lots of unplanned learning, mostly prompted by his own questions or by what happened around us. This last year he chose to focus on academics, especially polishing his grammar and spelling.

About a year ago, we started to feel that it was time for him to see for himself what school was like, partly because he was concerned about not knowing enough, partly because kids were always telling him how much fun it was to be with friends all day, partly because it seemed to me that a well-rounded education would include knowing what school was really like. I have always been an articulate advocate of the joys and advantages of homeschooling, and now we both felt that only by his experiencing school for himself could he continue to decide whether homeschooling or going to school would be best for him. So we set up for him to attend eighth grade for a day with a friend.

As preparation, we discussed various situations that might come up and how he might handle them. We had his friend over and asked him to describe his exact schedule of classes and what was done in each and what to expect at recess and lunch. The following week, we did what we could to prepare him for the classes. In computer class, they were doing animation, and Thumper had done a class at the Maui Research and Tech Park, so he was set for that. In math, they were doing batting averages and pie graphs, so we just had to tell Thumper what a batting average was, as he's never been into baseball. General sports was weight-lifting, which Thumper has done with his dad at home. In business, they were buying and selling stocks on paper, so we spent an hour or so teaching Thumper the basics about stocks and having him pick a few to "buy" out of the *Wall Street Journal.* We assumed this was that they used in school, but it turned out they use a watered-down sheet of paper listing a few stocks. In English, they write essays, so I gave Thumper a list of things to observe in school, and he was to write those up in English class. In Social Studies, they were doing worksheets from a textbook, so he could just read the textbook in that class.

As the day approached, we were both nervous, and when I drove away from the school that morning, my stomach was churning. I was aware all day of what class he was in, and at 2:00, I wrote the following:

"I sit waiting for school to get out and my son to call. Will he wish he'd gone from the beginning? Will he wish he'd gone earlier? Will he feel denied a full education? Will he be grateful for the freedom he's had? Will his education actually be better? Did he get harassed? Did he fit in? What's school really like now anyway? Was he dressed OK? Did he say or do the wrong thing? Have I raised a kid who doesn't fit in? Do I want my kid to 'fit in'? Have I held onto him for too long? Am I holding onto him at all? Did I choose this path for him or did he choose this path for me? Will he be sad over something that happened? What if his friends made him feel like an outsider? What if he's mad at me because I didn't send him to school? What if he's grateful? In some existential way, we have both taken a big step

today, letting go, so he can see for himself, choose for himself, his own path."

And here are the answers, told by Thumper in his English class essay, in his journal that day, and also three weeks later when he reflected on the experience:

"To me school seems a lot more slacked off than I thought it would be like. The work seems pretty easy. Nobody bugged me and stuff, but I don't think I would like it here, at least right now.

"In this one class, some of the kids goof off so much. They're all hiding under desks fooling around and being sarcastic to the teacher. I would crack if I went to school! It just seems like a waste of time. The other students' attitudes seem better than I thought, though.

"The activities seem pretty stupid and maybe a little too easy for them. Seems like I could catch on real fast. I know most of the stuff already, I think. The teachers seem pretty slacked off. They let lots of kids talk and seem to just ask, then yell, then threaten.

"Lots of kids bring candy to school. I couldn't believe how much candy they were busting out.

"By then (second period) I felt like I never wanted to go to school – I was overwhelmed with boredom ... I understood the math stuff and could've done it but it seemed sorta boring and pointless. Then the bell rang – finally – and we went to recess. We're walking through the school and among all these kids and for once I felt sort of like a regular kid, walking with a friend, seeing all these kids.

"Then in [one class] – you haven't been in hell until you've been in [that class]. ... [The teacher] says she'll introduce me and she's yelling at the kids and then she turns to me and says 'Sorry' and yells at the kids some more. And she tells me, 'It's like this every day.' I think, 'How can God be so cruel to one human?' ... I asked [one student] what class he'd do all day if he could only do one and he said that one. He'd rather not be learning anything and just goofing off than learn stuff he could apply. I never saw chaos 'til I saw that class.

"I think I'd get C's and B's to start and within a month, I'd be getting at least all B's. I feel the stuff I do at home is harder. It seemed like they got about 45 minutes of work done all day, and my friend said it was an average day. It's amazing how slow it goes!

"... I'm so glad I'm homeschooling. I used to feel dumb when I would mess up and stuff but to see how much I get done compared to them, I feel real good about my school, my intelligence, and life overall is great!

I also heard it was this big social scene and it wasn't. There was about as much taunting and hassling as I expected, and it seemed like the kids were just school friends. It didn't seem too social to me.

"The school experience made me a lot more extroverted and it put everything into perspective. Now I don't get so embarrassed if I say something stupid, and I'm more willing to goof off and crack jokes in front of more people. I feel more confident in myself and that I'm doing the right thing with my life." ◆

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Challenges & Concerns

Worries About Writing

Sue Klassen of New York writes:

Nathan, my 10-year-old son, avoids writing. He can print neatly, though slowly, and practices cursive sporadically. He chooses to study spelling, and to copy the words, but writing down his own thoughts is beyond his tolerance. The mechanics interfere with his thought processes. Dictating is fine. Other than occasional short notes or labels, he does not write things down himself, and he quickly lost interest in learning to type.

I accept this. Ninety-five percent of the time, I have full confidence that he will learn to write what he needs to write when he needs to write it. I was comforted to read Peter Kowalke's story, "Making a Writer Out of a Nonwriter," in GWS #119 – a dramatic example of learning when ready and motivated. But I would appreciate hearing the observations or reflections of others with similar or parallel experiences.

Since I am new to the pages of GWS, a brief history of our journey is in order. Though I learned about homeschooling when Nathan was an infant and was drawn to the concept, I was not ready to take the leap until the combination of a book loaned to me and a friend's decision to begin homeschooling dropped scales from my eyes and I knew I was ready to try. School and psychiatric evaluations of Nathan's Attention-Deficit Disorder, poor fine motor coordination, poor use of time, poor organizational skills, and inability to complete work sheets, as well as a recognition of his keen mind, deep thinking, and excellent vocabulary, jived with my own observations of a child fascinated by the world, alive and growing, but allergic to "seat work."

My husband and I decided that we wanted Nathan to keep up with the academics of his peers since we were not sure we would continue homeschooling. We also wanted his schedule as open as possible for exploration and learning his own way. At the start, we had daily non-negotiable skill drills that were supposed to take only one hour. I soon learned, though, that the battles and tensions of skill drills could poison half the day. All of homeschooling was wonderful except these drills. I required journaling twice a week – he had written in a journal about that often in school, after all, writing delightful accounts of special moments. At home, though, I never won a writing battle. I realized if I pushed hard enough to win in the short term, the long-term losses could be much greater.

Nathan never wrote a story or journal entry after he came home. Not even six words. He would happily dictate, showing a high degree of organization of thought, good vocabulary, and varied sentence structure. Within a month, I stopped even broaching the subject of his writing things down himself. Instead, I took dictation periodically, which we both enjoyed, though it took a lot of my time. Over time, I stopped forcing *any* subject material; we did things by mutual consent. A GWS subscription could have shortened my two-year learning curve substantially, but even to a certified teacher, truth can become apparent eventually.

Our family attended the GWS conference this summer. I felt deeply fed and nurtured, supported on the path I have been following. One of the important moments for me was the grown homeschoolers' panel. When the panelists were asked what they would say in hindsight to their parents, each said, in essence, "Don't worry." This was so comforting to me, because I have worried a lot in unhelpful ways over various specific issues.

During the first days of September, this year, Nathan and I talked about plans and goals for the coming year. After discussing all the other subject areas, we talked about writing. I know he desires to be a literate adult. Writing, I reminded him, is an important part of literacy. In our society, it is important to be able to express oneself clearly in writing. (This is not news to him, of course, but it is one of those things I find myself saying.) Nathan set the minimal goal of continuing to copy his spelling words and sometimes copying a funny sentence containing those words.

"Mom," he explained with self-assurance, "Some people are like helicopters – they just take off in writing. But I am more like an airplane, taxiing down the runway before take-off."

"You did write beautiful journal articles when you were in school, though," I reminded him gently.

"Yes. I am an airplane on its second trip. I took a short flight in school," he responded.

"And crash landed when we started homeschooling," I joked. Nathan laughed. "My plane disappeared in the Bermuda triangle." Shortly, Nathan picked up the metaphor again, with insight that touched me deeply:

"I am taxiing down the runway – I need a long runway – but if I run out of runway someday, I will just take off." And (ninety-five percent of the time) I believe he will.

Handling a Relative's Criticism

Vicky Meier-Jahn of Colorado writes:

My children, ages 7 and 4, are growing and learning beautifully. Much of the time, my confidence in that fact remains steadfast. However, my sister, a public school special educator, moved back into our state after a long absence and began to question our children's education. After she observed my 7-year-old son Sam, she concluded he was in need of help. Since Sam could not read and his speech was less than crystal clear, she offered her very traditional professional services and advice. While her intentions were well meant, I disagreed. Nevertheless, my confidence wavered.

I attempted to explain to her what

unschooling means to our family. I described how Sam teaches himself. I told her that last year Sam learned to add, subtract, and multiply because numbers fascinated him, not because I drilled and tested him. Sam loves to learn and asks questions about everything. I told her how Sam follows complicated K-NEX blueprints to make numerous models (K-NEX are a toy building system). I told her that the other day he made up a couple of poems, which I wrote down for him. Both of my children use their fantastic imaginations. I explained that they have a lot of time to play and that I feel this is extremely important to their development.

My sister listened, and I thought she understood a little. But she continues to test his skills. She asks him many questions to determine his skill level. She doesn't test our other nieces and nephews who attend public school; apparently she is satisfied that their educational needs are being met. She encourages Sam to come and give oral reports to her class about his interests in insects or other things. She wanted him to officially write down his poems without my assistance. She gives us official worksheets and teaching guides. Fortunately, she hasn't graded him. In spite of all these differences between us, I know that she loves us and believes these actions are best for us. Nonetheless, her behavior has tested my tolerance and I may eventually have to ask her to back off. For now, I can use this as an opportunity to learn about acceptance.

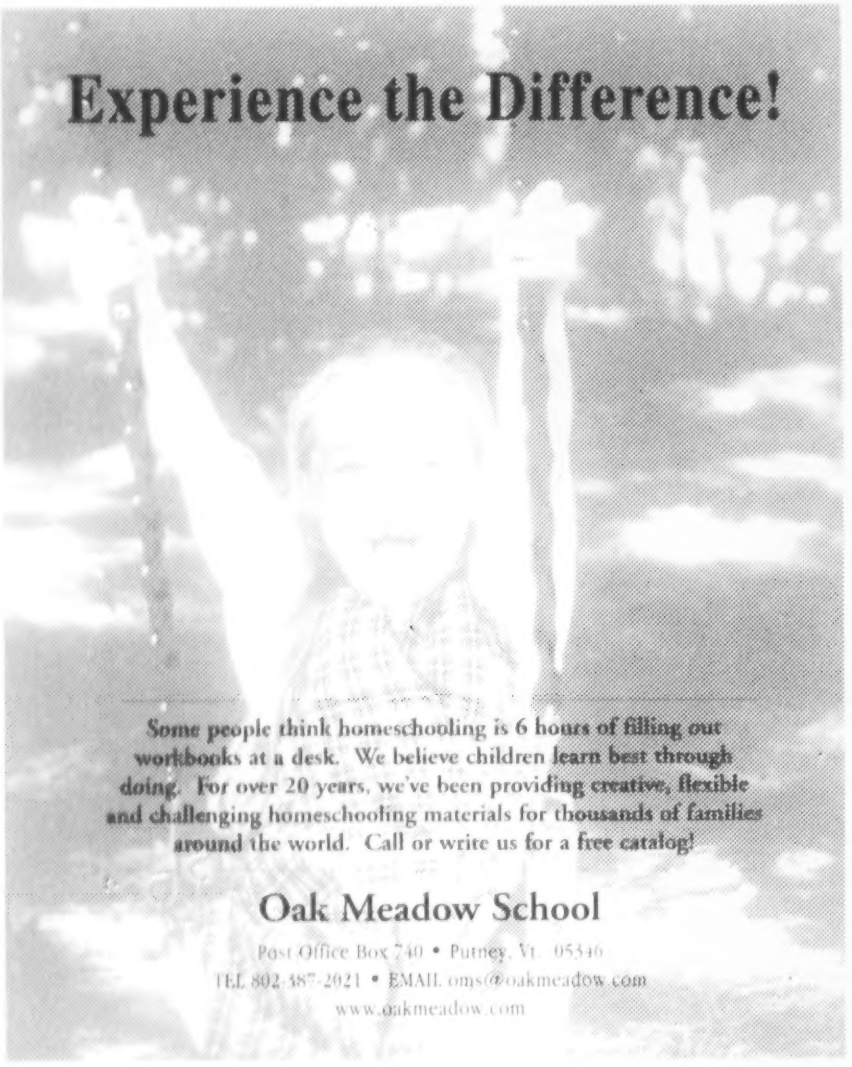
More than once during this time, her questions were enough to make me doubt our approach and I even considered using a traditional curriculum. Then all of a sudden, Sam taught himself to read. He did it on his own without daily drills, worksheets, and tests. Additionally, his speech is becoming clearer (this was a problem about which I was still uncertain what to do and thought my sister's assessment could be correct). I proudly told my sister of Sam's latest accomplishments, knowing she would test him the next time we see her. I'll try not to be too upset by it, because I think it is hard for many people, not just my sister, to understand the philosophy and beauty of unschooling.

Learning to Live Together

Kathy Richardson (NY) writes:

Each GWS letter I read is basically a confirmation of the rightness of our decision to continue homeschooling. After I absorb details, insight, and encouragement, I imagine scenarios, for instance: the writer of the story I'm reading has 30 pen-pals, is learning about worldwide culture, languages, geography, and spelling *and* is so busy writing her pen-pals that her bedroom floor is carpeted with hastily discarded clothes, her mom reminds her six times that it is her turn to vacuum and dust the living room, her dad tells her that she has to earn money to pay for all that postage, and Mom and Dad both worry because she's cooped up in her room and not at all interested in socializing!

The reality of my daughter Sam (13) at this moment: she is on the phone almost every waking hour if her friends aren't here. In either case, between giggles and confidences about boys, they are playing music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(either canned, or she on guitar, her cousin Megan on piano, etc.), or Sam has them listening to and/or reading with her scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. In the evening I can sometimes talk her into washing dishes. Her bedroom floor *is* covered with clothes, a stew of clean and dirty. She's always expected me to get food and drinks for her, as well as provide spellings and meanings of words. I've begun to say no occasionally to the waitressing and, after an initial complaint, she's off to the kitchen herself. And, this week, I've seen her looking up words in the dictionary.

The public education system also has to deal with the personalities and problems of children. As a matter of fact, that seems to be a major issue, often superseding so-called education itself. I feel lucky to be dealing with one developing human being whom I personally know instead of 30 virtual strangers who leave at the end of nine or ten months and are replaced by 30 more strangers.

Homeschooling is not a perfect scenario unless you redefine the word perfect, or perhaps throw it out entirely. Getting it right means accepting that we all – parents and children – learn more than the three R's. We learn to communicate, to express anger and disbelief, to compromise, to capitulate. We learn to live within our families. We learn to co-exist in this world.

Choosing Early Motherhood

Stephanie D'Arcangelo-Dalmer (VT) writes:

Last year, when I was 19, Jeremy and I were married at a state park in Lake Champlain, surrounded by family and friends. Then on January 3, our daughter Mariah Lynn was born at home weighing a healthy 8 pounds, 8 ounces.

As a lifelong unschooler who believes in doing what feels right, and not always what others expect, I had come to a crossroads in my life. I was entering into adulthood with many paths in front of me. I had been accepted to the two colleges I had applied to and had many interests that I wanted to pursue. This is when I made the unconventional decision *not* to choose the expected path of college, travel, or apprenticing. I chose to get married and raise a family as my first priority. Now I plan to pursue my interests along *with* my family.

Jeremy and I were very disappointed at the response we received regarding our choice to marry and become pregnant at such a young age and without having completed college. We were treated as though we were making a mistake, or dealing with a mistake, when in actual fact we had made an educated life decision. It was as though people thought we were giving up our chance at education and experiences and committing ourselves to a lifetime of poverty. We learned that, according to the general attitude, it was not only unacceptable but actually wrong to want to have a family unless you have finished college and are financially set.

In no way do I feel that I have given up anything by getting married and having a baby at my age. In fact, I

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COLLIN DAHLGREN

16 year old unschooler

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feel that I have gained more knowledge about life, relationships, and child development than I could have learned any other way. I have dedicated many hours to reading about pregnancy, childbirth, child development, and brain development in infants and children, along with hours spent talking and listening to other parents. It has been quite an enriching experience.

I feel that my background as a homeschooler has affected this decision in many ways. One obvious reason is that growing up as the second oldest of seven children, where we were all homeschooled and spent more time together than other families, I learned how to have close relationships that I value and that will last a lifetime. I learned through being with my parents and siblings, not a bunch of strange children and teachers in a home economics class, *how* to be a functioning mem-ber of a family. Many people I have seen or read about do not find out about birthing choices or schooling choices or how to take care of themselves during pregnancy or how to acquire relationship skills for a healthy marriage and an emotionally healthy family. I feel that learning how to be a parent and having a caring, happy marriage is important and not something that you can go into blindly. To me raising an emotionally healthy family is the greatest contribution that anyone can make to society.

Another way that homeschooling has influenced the direction my life has taken is that I do not feel pressured or restricted by society's expectations of what someone my age should be doing. I feel confident doing what feels right to me. I have been raised with the belief that there are always possibilities if you really want to do something, and I am living proof. I am now 20, married, and have a 9-month-old daughter, and I do not plan to waste my life away. My husband is a sophomore at the University of Vermont, majoring in computer science (and doing very well), and my daughter is learning to crawl, stand, and talk. My plan up until now had been to put off college until my daughter was older and my husband was out of school and could take care of her. I have since decided that I would like to have more children, so I am planning to work on a degree from home while raising Mariah.

Obviously, getting married and having children is not the right choice for everyone, whether my age or older. But I would like to challenge the notion that marrying and having children at a young age is not a reasonable life choice, and to lend my support to others who feel the same way. To me, unschooling is a philosophy of taking charge of your own life and not always following the crowd. It's about questioning boundaries and doing what you believe is right.

Stephanie and Mariah (see story, left)

What Unschooling Means

Chris Davis (MA) writes in response to Cindy Gaddis's letter in GWS #119, "Unschooling: Philosophy or Learning Style?":

I was glad to see Cindy Gaddis's letter. I have recently been thinking about this topic as well, as a result of hearing people express doubt about being unschoolers when their children are involved in activities that have a more rigid or visible structure. I used to feel this same doubt when I left school and began directing my own education: how far would I have to go and act to be an unschooler?

In the winter of 1996 I lived with three homeschooling families, each for about four weeks. Up until that time, I had never met any homeschoolers; I had only read about them. During this time, I saw how differently each family homeschools. I also realized that none of the families I stayed with could adequately be described as being on either end of a spectrum between unschooling and schooling. Each family, even the one that looked very close to how I had envisioned unschooling, was involved in activities that could easily be seen as having a lot more external control, orders and expectations from others, and deadlines than I had expected. For example, the six children in three families I lived with were involved in dance classes, math classes, piano lessons, study groups, book discussion groups (and one of the girls went to play rehearsal for a few hours four or five times a week). Many, if not most, homeschoolers I have met have at one time or another used workbooks, and I have heard about those who take a class or two at a local school or college, choose to try school full time, and take all sorts of classes or join groups that I had never even thought of.

At first, I viewed unschooling as a pond, small and narrow, and then as I learned more about it, it turned into a lake. Now I am trying to see it more as an ocean, expanding and broadening its meaning in my life. As Susannah Sheffer said in GWS #118, homeschooling gives us the freedom to do what interests and works for us, even if that means seeking more external structure, and it also gives us the freedom to say no to what doesn't work for us. From observing these families and reflecting on my own life, I came to believe that it's not how visible structure is but rather the reasons for pursuing a certain activity or path that are important in unschooling. I think one of the most important factors is that the child or teenager makes the decision to go to school, or to spend hours and hours each week preparing for a play, or, as in my case, work in an office 35 hours each week. It's not so much what people do – learning Spanish in a school classroom or through traveling in South America – but rather why they do it, how they feel about it, and how they affect others. ◆

Focus

Homeschooling Children with Special Needs

Post-Polio Syndrome

From Derrick Simpson of Illinois:

My son Fasika is 12 years old. He's Ethiopian-born. I adopted him five years ago; he came to me at 7 1/2. He lived in an orphanage from the time he was approximately three months old until I got him, and in the orphanage there was very little social or intellectual stimulation. He suffered a lot of deprivation, and he also has post-polio syndrome, which refers to the effects that polio leaves on the central nervous system. When he came to me he was walking very badly, with a cane. Now he uses a leg brace, although he can walk on his own without the brace, and he uses a wheelchair for community mobility – for going distances longer than a block – and for playing tennis and basketball. He's had one major surgery and 15 braces so far.

I said, "If you're having so many difficulties at school, how about if we do our learning on our own?" His first reaction was that I was punishing him for his inability to learn in school. Then he was worried about my ability to teach him.

Originally, he was to be adopted by another family, but when he came to them, they felt, from his behavior, that he must be retarded, and they felt that the adoption agency had misrepresented the child. They didn't want him after all. I had been waiting for a child, and I got a call from the agency saying that a child was available because there had been a disruption in the previous placement. The agency didn't agree with the previous family's assessment. I was invited to meet with the child and make my own determination. After I spent some time with him, I went back home, thought about my resources, learned a little bit about post-polio, and thought about what kind of help I could provide. By the following week I had made my decision: that this was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I wanted to adopt this boy.

I knew full well that I didn't have the full picture. Fasika didn't speak English when we first met, so I couldn't have a conversation with him. But my concern was: could I improve this child's life? In my non-professional estimation, he was quite capable of doing better than he was currently. I have some background in physical therapy, and when I first visited with him and took him back to my hotel to put him in the pool, I saw that he was able to move his legs; he just wasn't able to support the weight properly. I saw that there was room for improvement.

I had a different attitude toward the behaviors that had made the other family question Fasika's mental capacity. I felt that a lot of what he was exhibiting was what people call "post-institutional behavior." For example, he had never really seen electricity, so if he was flipping a light switch on and off, that was not necessarily autistic behavior, as some thought; it was just that he was fascinated by being able to turn a light on by flipping a switch.

One reason I felt able to take on this challenge was that by profession, I design computer systems for the health care industry, and I've also worked in the industry as a provider for general skilled nursing care and physical therapy. I knew, from my various clients, that there were a lot of resources available. For example, I knew from the work being done at the Rehab Institute of Chicago that if nothing else, we could get this kid to the point that he could walk without using a cane.

I also felt that this was a great chance, because the fact is that when children are of color, older, and disabled, those are three strikes against them when it comes to their chances for being adopted. I felt his chances for adoption were really minimal.

I had no thought of homeschooling at this point. I didn't know anything about it. I was a terrible student in school; I lost hearing in one ear at a very early age and neither my family nor the educational system realized it. I was treated pretty badly as a result. In eighth grade, I really couldn't do division and multiplication, and I had difficulty all through high school. It wasn't until I started to learn on my own, when my father started to take an interest in my education, that I actually realized I could learn. But I hadn't thought of that as homeschooling. After Fasika had been with me a few months, I put him in a

school for children with disabilities within the Chicago public school system. We put him in kindergarten even though he was 7. He did OK for the first year or so. I think the school saw him as a novel challenge, and they wanted him in their system very much. He was going to be their prize, their star.

But the situation began to deteriorate because I realized he had some issues that they simply would not address. I felt he had difficulty with receptive and expressive language. At first I wasn't sure if the problem was just that English was his second language or if it was a real deficit, but I saw that although he had a strong memory and could handle subjects like spelling and math – subjects that stayed fairly constant – without a problem, if you introduced new concepts, it was hard for him.

I fought with the system for several years to give him speech therapy. They refused to do it. They thought he had no speech issues. Every six months or so, I would have him evaluated by pediatric psychologists, to give the school some idea of his functioning and his thinking. I would make these pediatric psychologists available to the school, so that if the teachers wanted to learn more about Fasika's condition or about what might help him, they could call these other specialists, free of charge. But they simply ignored that advice and wouldn't call at all.

My son was feeling like the school wouldn't teach him. He wanted to go to school very much, because in Ethiopia, going to school is a privilege, and that was how he saw it. But he would come home angry. He'd say, "The teacher said something, but when I told her I didn't understand it, she just said the same thing again." I had noticed that I could get concepts across to him, but not if I used the conventional methods. If you're with your child so much of the time, you learn how they will react, what they will understand. I also realized that Fasika was working four and a half hours each night to do his homework, and he was still often getting lost. He was really hating the situation, and while I could probably get him the right services if I continued to fight, my feeling was that I had fought for three and a half years and I wasn't going to wait any longer.

A friend of mine had given me an article on homeschooling and suggested I try it. I went to a homeschooling conference where I met Jean Kulczyk who edits the newsletter *At Our Own Pace*. I saw all these other people who were doing it and it was working for them, which inspired me. I knew that I could communicate ideas to my son, but I hadn't been sure that I could gather all the resources to teach him what he needed to know. I questioned my own competence, given my own schooling. Since I had struggled so much in school, how could I teach my son everything now? But the conference focused on lots of alternative ideas and on flexibility. I realized that after getting over so many medical issues with Fasika, I could certainly do homeschooling.

Of course, various people questioned my decision to homeschool. But when I had decided to adopt a child as a single parent, people said, "You have to be nuts." When I said I would adopt a child from a foreign country, people said, "You've gone off the deep end." When I said the child had special needs – well, now I was certifiable. So

Resources for Homeschooling Children with Special Needs

At Our Own Pace is a newsletter for homeschooling families with special needs. Jean Kulczyk began publishing the newsletter two years ago, after speaking at a conference organized by HOUSE (a state homeschooling group) and Northern Illinois University. After speaking about homeschooling children with special needs, Jean saw that there was a need for a nonsectarian newsletter that would interview parents about their experiences, share information and resources, and help parents connect with one another. Jean has a master's degree in special education, grew up with an older brother who had suffered massive brain damage, and is homeschooling a child with learning disabilities. Her newsletter reviews products such as assistive devices that help kids with neurological difficulties do art projects, and Jean also reviews general-interest products with her specific audience in mind. For example, she will let her readers know whether a particular material requires reading ability, or fine motor coordination, in order to be enjoyed.

At Our Own Pace is published monthly and is available free of charge, but donations from families who can afford them are gratefully accepted. At Our Own Pace, c/o Jean Kulczyk, 102 Willow Dr, Waukegan IL 60087; 847-662-5432; email yukko@aol.com

Nat'l Challenged Homeschoolers Assoc (NATHHAN), in operation for eight years, is a Christian organization providing encouragement to homeschooling families with special-needs children. The group provides a quarterly magazine, a family directory, and a lending library that operates through the mail. For local or visiting families, NATHHAN has a parent learning center – a building with various materials and equipment that parents can examine themselves. As well, NATHHAN's family camp is open from June through September each year. The camp offers families or groups the chance to come and spend time looking at NATHHAN's resources, meet one another, and enjoy hands-on experience at the farm where NATHHAN is located. Visitors to the camp stay anywhere from a day to a week.

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GWS Annual Lists of Resources, published each year in our Mar./Apr. issue, includes people with experience in various areas who are willing to write or talk with others. Areas include autism, down syndrome, physical handicaps, and adoption. See pp. 34-38 of this issue.

Fasika receives a birthday present from his grandmother: one dollar for each year of his life and one dollar for each year he's been in this country.

homeschooling, added to the mix, was just unfathomable. My family said, "How can you possibly teach this child?", friends said, "Put him in the classroom and let him sink or swim, don't make exceptions for him because in the world no one will make exceptions." The school, too, told me I couldn't do it, although I had already read the statutes and knew that I only had to notify the school as a courtesy. Other homeschoolers reassured me by saying, "It's working for us, and it's worth a try," but what finally decided it for me was one night when Fasika and I were working on his homework. I realized: he spends all day in school, and he's got to line up, wait, then wait in the classroom, wait for others to get ready, then line up again. And meanwhile we were spending several hours each night together doing homework, so I said to myself, "I'm teaching him anyway."

Fasika himself was quite afraid of homeschooling. I suggested the idea to him by saying, "If you're having so many difficulties at school, how about if we do our learning on our own?" His first reaction was that I was punishing him for his inability to learn in school. Then he was worried about my ability to teach him. He said, "I have all these teachers in school, but here I only have you, so how can you teach all that stuff?" I helped him put aside those fears by saying, "OK, what kinds of things do you want to learn? What do you think they weren't teaching you in school?" I let him make the initial decisions about the curriculum, knowing full well that there were going to be additional things he was going to need to know but that I would tailor it to his needs and interests. We used a lot of manipulatives and we went out into society and made learning part of the process of everyday life. It took Fasika about a month to get used to it, and then one day he was talking with a teacher who used to visit us on occasion. She felt homeschooling was a bad thing, but she asked him how he liked it. He said, "When I was going to regular school, I was still waiting at 9:30 for the bus to come, but now I start at 8:30 and in one morning I learn more than I did in a week at school."

We work together from 8:30 to 11:30 and then in the afternoons we generally go out and put the concepts we've learned into practice. Fasika now takes responsibility: he's up on time, he's ready to work, he understands how to be organized. He's now reading independently, whereas in school he could recognize words but couldn't really read sentences. The major improvement has been in his ability to comprehend what's being said to him or what's being read. In school, they didn't realize that he was only comprehending about 40% of what they were saying. He had developed a lot of coping mechanisms to hide this.

At home, working one-on-one was a big help, because it eliminated all the distractions of the classroom. The flexibility was also a big help. I have the luxury of presenting something in the morning and then presenting it two or three different ways throughout the day. It's harder for a classroom teacher to do that.

I said earlier that the people at Fasika's school had been opposed to homeschooling. His teacher had said to me, "How can you school this child at home? He needs to be with his peers." But I said, "The other children in this classroom are not necessarily his peers; they don't necessarily have the same issues that he has." He was also interacting with attendants who used foul language, bus drivers who often had been drinking, teachers who were angry with him because he wasn't learning properly. I didn't think that was the only or the most appropriate social environment. People say, "You can't make choices for him all his life," and I respond that I can make some choices now so that he has examples to follow.

We have a large family in which children are valued, so he has many family members to interact with, including many children his age. He does volunteer work at the local library, helping out with the computer. He has friends on the block, some kids who don't tease him too much, and he gets along with them. He takes music lessons, he has several telescopes and friends who are involved in that, he's learning how to knit and will take a sewing course with other children. So he has many ways to interact with others. There are homeschooling groups in our area as well, but they are a considerable distance from us so we don't attend regularly.

I work from my home. I designed my life this way because I knew that as a single parent, I was not going to adopt a child and then put him in daycare. So I work with clients over the phone or via email. When I have to go into the hospital once a week to meet with someone directly, Fasika goes with me, and he has made friends with some of the children in the hospital. He enjoys helping them, working with them on computers, and it's a good feeling for him to be helping.

Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder

From Wendy Renish of Wisconsin:

We adopted our daughter Rosie almost 14 years ago, as a newborn. She had severe asphyxiation at birth, with possible brain damage, and we were told that she might have cerebral palsy, or mental retardation, or a whole range of different problems.

By the time she was 6 months old, it was obvious that she had had severe damage of some kind, and doctors were already starting to diagnose autism – a multi-system disorder which involves not only neurological problems but immunological problems, metabolic problems, and all sorts of other problems that make things very difficult. Autism isn't usually diagnosed until a child is between 18 and 36 months, and the doctor told us we would have to wait until Rosie was 2 to receive a formal diagnosis. We were living with a child who couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't stand to be touched, and I asked what we should do. But we were left with no help; we were simply told to wait. Being trained in research, I began to research autism. At that time, the primary cause was thought to be what they called "refrigerator mom" – a cold, unfeeling mother. We thought that was ridiculous, because we had devoted an exceptional amount of attention to this child.

We knew we had to do something. I had seen a woman who had set up a program in Canada that involved "mirroring." She worked with autistic boys and, for hours on end, she mirrored everything they did. She had some spectacular results – she was having a breakthrough 60% of the time, which was far higher than was common. (She was clear that this didn't mean the children were cured, but she was getting response and reaction, which no one else had gotten before.) So we decided to try this with Rosie. We sat down with her hour after hour, and everything she did, we did. It's an extremely intensive, one-on-one technique. Although its primary goal is to help the child, it also helps the parent, because you want so much to have a connection with your child. To be honest, it can be hard to love these kids, because it's not just kids who need love; parents need love too, we need give and take. If you're not getting any response from your baby, it can be very difficult. Finally, when Rosie was 9 months old, I saw a flickering in her eyes, something that said, "Hey, I know who you are." It was wonderful, because I began to feel that there was a whole person in there and that it was my responsibility to find out who that person was.

We continued to work with her in this way, trying to communicate any way we could. When she was a year old, if we were stacking up blocks together, I could get a reaction from her by knocking the blocks down. And later on we used puppets, which worked wonderfully, because it was easier for her to look at the puppets than to look at us directly. It's so difficult for these kids in so many ways; they have many sensory problems, and the hemispheres of their brain may not be connected, so something as simple as looking directly at a person isn't simple at all.

When you're using a program such as the one we were following, it's very hard to get professional help. Such programs are very time-consuming and intensive and aren't something school districts usually want to get involved in. My goal was always to mainstream this child, to get her into a school setting. I spent a year trying to find a school for her. I was working part time with the public schools and had been hired to set up community programs. I found that autistic children were classified as emotionally disturbed and that proper services were often not being provided.

We firmly believed that our daughter needed peer interaction, so we put her in a private kindergarten. This worked quite well, because by that time, she was verbal, and her diagnosis had been changed from autism to pervasive developmental disorder. I didn't tell her teacher either of these diagnoses, but just said that my daughter was extraordinarily shy. The truth was that she was in transition at this point: she talked at times, but at other times she would shut down. Still, the teacher was great. She believed my daughter was shy, and she made allowances. Rosie did like being with people, she just couldn't relate to them as other children did.

With all the problems we were having getting her the right services in school, and spending time helping her to get ready for school, helping her with homework, and helping her with social issues, we had no time for the one-on-one work she really needed.

In first grade, the situation was very different. The work was harder, the kids were sitting at desks, and the teacher was very different from the kindergarten teacher. Things just fell apart. So the private school was no longer working out, and I didn't want to put her in public school because I knew the schools in the area were very rough. We moved to a small rural district, thinking she would be safer there, but she would just sit in the classroom and glaze over – it was almost like she was having a petit mal seizure – and although she was no trouble, she also wasn't getting any help. We fought to try to get appropriate special ed services, but it would turn out that she would only get five minutes a day, or the teacher wouldn't be trained in the kind of help she needed.

Finally, when she was in sixth grade, a little parochial school accepted us. It was wonderful for her socially, because the school was so welcoming. Nobody teased her, banged her up, or stole things from her as they had in the other schools. But we still couldn't get the special ed services we wanted. The supreme court has ruled that children, even in a parochial school, have a right to receive publicly provided special ed, but it was the same situation we had been through before: you have no say; they just tell

you what they're going to do. Meanwhile, this school only lasted through sixth grade and we had to decide what to do next.

A few years prior to this, we had met Dr. Stanley Greenspan, a psychiatrist in Bethesda, Maryland and author of *Challenging Child*. He's one of the leading child development specialists in the world, and he believes that through work, a child's autistic behavior can be changed. He has a program, similar to the mirroring we had done, called "floor time." He believes that parents play the major role in helping special-needs children; yes, you do need medical professionals for some things – Rosie needs help with allergies, a hearing impairment, and occupational therapy. When it comes to behavior, these intensive one-on-one programs take so much time that most of the work has to be done by the parents.

I talked about homeschooling with Dr. Greenspan. I told him that there was so much to focus on with Rosie. With all the problems we were having getting her the right services in school, and spending time helping her to get ready for school, helping her with homework, and helping her with social issues, we had no time for the one-on-one work she really needed. Of course, we had always homeschooled in the sense that we had been working with her ourselves for years, but we were also spending so much time on these outside school issues that we had no other life.

The idea of homeschooling was very scary, more so in some ways than it is for other parents. Rosie is very sweet, but there had also been times in the past when she had been very agitated. This is common with autistic children; the world comes crashing down, and it can be very difficult for the whole family. Also, parents of autistic children tend to have very little support. We're very isolated; we don't have the kind of child that makes neighbors want to come over and help out. So sending a child to school can feel like a respite.

I had also had the theory, for so long, that Rosie needed mainstreaming, needed peer interaction. But then I reached a point where I asked myself: what is this really doing for her? What we really needed was time with her, one-on-one time, free of all the fights with the school or with the special ed services. We had been going to Individualized Education Plan meetings once a month for years, trying to get what we needed.

In so many ways, not sending her to school has been a liberation. We don't have to worry about things like combing her hair or getting her shoes on in the morning, and we now have a protective environment in which to work with her, concentrating on her real areas of need. This is a child who, up to the age of 10, didn't know who she was when she looked at herself in the mirror. She could recognize parts of the body, but she had no sense of herself as a person. There are so many things that she missed, growing up, so many experiences that she participated in physically but not emotionally. So we can go to her level and fill in the gaps. For example, we had a Halloween party, of the kind you'd have in second or third grade. We recognized that even though she is 13, emotionally she's still about a second or third grader. Think of how difficult junior high school usually is for any adolescent – can you imagine how hard it would be for her if she were in the public junior high school?

At the same time, it's wonderful that Rosie has friends her own age who treat her respectfully. Her best friend told me that she sees Rosie as her younger sister. For Rosie to have a friend who calls her up on the phone, just as anyone would, is just wonderful. She met this girl at the parochial school, and I'm really grateful to the teachers there for insisting that the other girls include her. In my experience in the public schools, special needs kids are often cut off and can be harassed by the other kids.

One thing Rosie would really like is to be pen-pals with another homeschooled girl her age. I wonder if there are any GWS readers who would be interested. It would have to be someone who would understand that Rosie's letters may seem like those of a younger child, in many ways; someone who would treat her respectfully, asking her specific questions about herself that she could answer and then writing back about the same things.

Academically, Rosie is also improving at home. Her speech has improved, because she can talk more slowly, think more slowly. She has always had trouble with auditory and visual processing, so reading was difficult – she can read, but she seldom remembers what she reads. At home, we started with *Stuart Little*. I would read one or two chapters a day, and we would talk about them, and then I would come back the next day and say, "What did we talk about?" She would have no idea; she wouldn't even remember the name of the book. No wonder she was having trouble in school! We are using techniques for helping with her auditory and visual processing difficulties, and she is learning how to visualize what happens in each chapter. We play-act the sentences, or we incorporate them into art lessons. She is doing so much better.

Homeschooling is, of course, harder for us than it is for many other families. Rosie can't be as self-directed as other kids can be; I can't just give her a math book and let her figure it out for herself. It would help me to have other adults around and to have access to libraries and dance lessons and other activities that Rosie could benefit from and that would give me a respite. We plan to move closer to a city for that reason. The best schooling for Rosie would be homeschooling in the morning, where she gets the intensive one-on-one time she needs. In the afternoon we are looking to find group activities for the peer interaction she also needs.

Our family would be willing to share our knowledge and experiences with other families, homeschooling or not, with autism, PDD, and "learning disabilities." There are new ways of thinking about these issues that are not widely used yet. ◆

Both Derrick Simpson and Wendy Renish are included in our list of Resource People, pp. 35-36.

Making Home a Haven:
Interview with Victoria Moran

Victoria Moran, writer and homeschooling mother, recently published a book called *Shelter for the Spirit: How to Make Your Home a Haven in a Hectic World.* Now Victoria speaks to GWS readers about what they're already doing right and about how to make their homes even more nourishing, restorative, and supportive of growth and learning.

Susannah Sheffer: Which came first for you – centering more of your life in your home through homeschooling, working at home, and so on, or thinking about making your home an aesthetically satisfying and comforting place?

Victoria Moran: It actually started with a home birth, which I had never planned to have. I went to a regular gynecologist when I found out I was pregnant, and she immediately began talking about all sorts of interventions which didn't appeal to me. I thought, "I need another doctor," and a friend found an ad for a doctor who did home birth. I decided to have a home birth, and through it I got involved in La Leche League, where I met a wonderful couple who had already decided that their kids would homeschool. Being a good friend and someone who liked to read, I thought I'd read some of John Holt's books to understand what my friends were planning. I would never do that myself, of course! But I did end up doing it.

SS: So with home birth and then homeschooling, more of your life was going on at home. When did you turn your attention to what your home was like as a physical space?

VM: That came somewhat later. My husband died when our daughter Rachael was 4, and after that I very distinctly got the message from the culture: "Poor dear, you don't have a real home, you don't have all the pieces." I had a rebellious streak in me that made me say, "You just watch me, you watch how real our home can be." I wanted to show that my home could be just as wonderful as anybody's, and I wanted to make a nest for us, a safe haven which would also be a portrait of Rachael and me. One day about four years ago, when Rachael was 10, I realized that I had done it: even though we were renting an apartment at the time and the space wasn't opulent, there was so much life in that place, so much energy. It so reflected who we were, in every way. My work was centered there, Rachael's "school" was there, the food co-op delivered there, we had friends in and out all the time. That's when I decided to write *Shelter for the Spirit.*

SS: What can people do to begin to get the feeling you realized your home had?

VM: The first thing, which is something a lot of GWS readers already do, is spend a lot of time there. So many people are just gone so much that they can't feel at home in the place where they live. Another thing is to make your home the center of something real, something other than just eating and sleeping. Certainly homeschooling and home business do that. Homes that feel really vital are places where something is going on, some kind of creative pursuit, a center of connection with the outer world. A first step is to commit to doing something in this place other than just having it look good.

SS: I think most homeschoolers can identify with that and feel that their homes are centers of energy and activity. But maybe for just that reason, they may feel that their homes aren't as simple, or uncluttered, or aesthetic as you describe in your book. So what are some first steps people can take in that regard?

VM: First of all, I think there are times in life when it's fine to have clutter – because you have small children, or a lot of children, or just because time is finite and you can either spend your time making your home neat and orderly or being with your kids and doing wonderful things. I've also become utterly convinced that there are some people who are just naturally neat, and it's unfair for the rest of us to compare ourselves to them. But there are some ways to make a path, and I have some specific suggestions for that. One is to have a room, preferably a front kind of room, that stays neat. If you can keep one space neat, you know that you can go there whenever you need order and peace of that kind. The other side of that is to have one room that's incredibly messy. Everybody has to have some kind of outlet: an art room, a playroom, someplace where it doesn't matter if there's glue on the floor. Of course, some people don't have enough space to make it a whole room, but even a messy area can be an outlet.

To me, it's a matter of respecting your home just as it's important to respect ourselves and each other. And I'd always choose a home that feels wonderful over a home that looks wonderful.

Another thing I believe in is the seasonal closet cleaning and excess purge. Actually, if I were writing the book now, I wouldn't use the word purge, because I think it's too harsh and it scares people. But you can do a

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scan: you look things over and pull out what you're honestly not using. There are all those rules that say, "If you haven't used it in a year, get rid of it." I think of doing it more intuitively. If you know you can part with it, do that. If you're on the fence, put it in a "six month" box and then, if you haven't used it in six months, then you can get rid of it.

One thing that's helpful to realize is that, with children, we're really giving them the idea of what's normal. If they grow up around a lot of stuff – even if it's good stuff – they're going to think that having a lot of stuff is normal. I think people learn how much they need from how much they're around as kids. And if you need less stuff, you have more freedom in your life.

SS: And then we come to the question of housework and housecleaning, which so many homeschoolers seem to write about and struggle with: how much to do? how much should the kids help? There are sort of two conflicting ideas: if we're home more than most people, it's that much more important that our home be neat and aesthetically pleasing, or, since we're busy doing so many other things when we're home, we can't give housework priority.

VM: Well, if you really *live* at home, it's going to be messier than if you don't. But if you look at housework in a different way, you can become someone who wants to spend more time on it. That's why I devote a whole chapter in *Shelter for the Spirit* to cleaning. When you clean, your body is occupied so your mind is free to drift. And you can look at cleaning as process more than product. When my daughter went to Montessori preschool before we started homeschooling, I was amazed at how the kids would fight to get to clean off the counter. They basically just made streaks, but they loved it. If we can get that way at least a bit, where we find some aspect of cleaning that seems pleasurable, it isn't as bad.

SS: What you said about the body being occupied but the mind drifting makes me think of the homeschooler I knew who told me she would get her best ideas for stories while washing dishes or folding laundry. Yet parents sometimes write us and say that they're so occupied with household chores that they don't have time to be creative. It seems at least in part to have to do with whether you feel allowed to let your mind drift in that way.

VM: Often, women who stay home with children have the idea that if they're not going out from 8 to 5, their houses should be really clean, maybe like their mothers' houses were. But so many things were different when many of us were growing up: Mom probably wasn't homeschooling or having a home business, people tended to live in fewer square feet in the '50s, they didn't have as much stuff, and they had more time. We really can't expect everything of ourselves.

SS: What's the relationship between the physical mood of the home and the emotional mood? Can certain physical attributes facilitate emotional comfort and harmony, or will the home never really feel like a haven if there are family tensions and that sort of thing?

VM: Obviously, if you do a lot of work on your home itself but you're just doing it to cover up some serious problem, that's silly. But the issue is what you do with your time at home and how you feel about the place. You can do anything from any starting point; you take what you've got to work with. It's true that if the aesthetic aspects of your home are really discouraging, everything can feel harder. It's also sometimes easier to act yourself into thinking differently than to think yourself into acting differently. So if you take some action, even just some small action regarding your closet or the arrangement of your furniture, it might be a good beginning.

To me, it's a matter of respecting your home just as it's important to respect ourselves and each other. And I'd always choose a home that *feels* wonderful over a home that *looks* wonderful. I tell people to think back to the most welcoming home they know of. People often say, "It was my grandmother's kitchen, in a really tiny house but it always smelled really

good." It wasn't that this was *Better Homes and Gardens*, it's that there was a lot of love there. For me, the place I think of is a tiny apartment where we lived for four months when I was 9. It was not a great time in my life; my parents had just divorced, and my mother was moving to Spain. But my dad and my grandmother and I lived in this tiny apartment, and there was so much warmth and joy there as they tried to ease my transition through all the changes.

So you do what you're able to do, and then you just shut up about it. The worst thing, I think, is to keep saying, "Oh, this place is so messy, it's so awful." If it's really so awful and you hate it that much, take the day off and clean it. Or just let it be. If you have someone over for tea, and you have a great conversation, do you think that person is going to say afterwards, "Well, it was OK but there were streaks on the table"?

SS: We've been talking a lot about space, but I know it also resonates with homeschoolers when you talk about simplifying and decluttering your life in terms of time.

VM: It made me laugh, at one point, when I thought to myself: I homeschool my daughter, and I work at home, but we're never home. That really woke me up. We stopped going out so much to do so many things. We stopped automatically doing every activity that was offered to us. When you stop doing the activities that feel marginal to you, then the ones that are really important call to you, and you know what they are.

One thing that makes my life work is that I have specific office hours for doing my work. And although I never wanted to have "school hours" for Rachael, it can be nice to have "home hours" – to have two or three hours when you know you're going to be home and you can do some of those things that you would otherwise complain weren't getting done.

A concept I think we can have as homeschoolers is that every day is like a lump of clay and you make a piece of art out of it. Some days it's going to be intricate and beautiful and other days it's just going to be a lump of clay with a couple of eyes and a nose punched in it. But every day you can do something creative with it. The whole point of having a home that your soul can love is so that it becomes a place of quality, and every choice you make will be for quality, not quantity. I think we have an idea sometimes, as homeschoolers, that if we have enough *stuff* around – books, materials, the "right" games – it will rub off on our children and they'll be educated. But if you go to a restaurant with a child and they bring out a lot of food, the child gets overwhelmed and hardly eats anything. It's the same when we try to feed them too much "enrichment." It's important to listen to kids in this respect.

SS: What do you think homeschoolers can do to make their lives at home easier on themselves?

VM: When I start feeling overwhelmed, it helps me to remember what an amazing life I have. There are still people who have never heard of homeschooling and who are agonizing over what's going on with their children in school. We have this remarkable opportunity to let our children become precisely who they were designed to be. So I remind myself that I'm doing something magnificent, I'm watching a human being develop. So what if I have dishes in the sink or I mail out a book proposal tomorrow instead of today.

I think another thing that can happen with homeschoolers is that because we're doing something unusual, we tend to think, "Oh, my house is dirty because I homeschool" or "My kids didn't write Grandma a thank-you note because we homeschool." Whenever you do anything that society isn't supporting, that thing always seems to be the reason that things aren't perfect. But your child could be in school and the same things could happen. So often when people start homeschooling, it seems like only one thing, one choice. But like deciding to eat whole wheat bread instead of white and then discovering a whole world of natural foods, we start homeschooling and discover a whole world under our own roof. It seems like a small thing, but in fact it's enormous. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Bugs Not Books

Martha Goff Stoner of Michigan writes:

Neither of my boys learned to read until age 9. John (now 14) began to show interest around the age of 8, but it wasn't until he was 9 that he really began to read fluently. He started with *Berenstain Bears* books and comics. These were books I refused to read to him because I disliked them. I read and read and read to John from the time he was very young – not because I wanted him to read and was trying to teach him, but because we both loved stories. I always chose books that interested me. I am a college literature professor by training, and I love beautiful poetry and magical stories. I can't stand the watered-down stuff that publishers manufacture for kids these days. John heard Robert Louis Stevenson, A.A. Milne, and other beautifully written poetry. I want to stress that I was not reading these books to him out of a desire for him to read or out of an elitist attitude about good vs. bad literature. I simply couldn't stand to be bored! I read to him for hours and hours, and I had to receive something from it too.

So John's own reading began with the *Berenstain Bears* because Mom wouldn't read those books to him, but within a few months he was reading *Treasure Island* to himself. I was really surprised by the speed with which John's reading progressed. No one had pressured him about reading. I knew he would read when the time came, and I had no anxiety about it. I think this is one of the biggest hurdles for parents who want the child to learn at his or her own pace. If the parent becomes anxious, the child becomes anxious.

Once John got the idea of reading, he could read anything. He had a fine vocabulary because of all the reading aloud we had done together, and this vocabulary ability helped him zoom ahead once he knew how to sound words out. (I should add that John was tested when he was in second grade by a reading specialist who labeled him as learning disabled and said he would have great difficulty learning to read. He simply wasn't ready to do it at age 8.)

But Paul, my second child (now 10), is a different story. Because John had attended a Rudolf Steiner school through third grade, he had been introduced to letters there, but Paul had never attended school and had no formal training of any sort. When he was 5, he suddenly wanted to write stories down. He did not even know how to write letters, but he wanted to write a whole story, and he wanted to do it himself. He asked me how to write each letter and painstakingly did it himself. We have a great little story that he wrote, but that was it. He couldn't have cared less about making letters or reading to himself for years after that. Occasionally, he would dictate a story to me that I would type for him on my word processor. He was like that ancient mariner in Coleridge's poem who suddenly had a story come over him and would grab the first passerby who would listen. Mom was that passerby, and I recorded his stories for him. But I never pressured him to read.

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Paul loves physical activity. He's busy, busy, busy. He has no time for reading. Because we don't have a television and because everyone else in the house sits around reading, Paul has had some very frustrating evenings. He would come plaintively to each of us, book in hand, asking us to read to him. Sometimes we would. But often, we were happily enjoying our own books and didn't want to read to Paul.

I am not afraid of a child's boredom or frustration. I've never believed it was my job to entertain my child. In fact, boredom and frustration are great motivators to learning, in my opinion. So Paul sometimes found someone who would read to him and sometimes didn't.

Finally, at the age of 9, he began to notice letters. Now this is something I think parents are way too hasty about. Parents are always pushing letters in front of their child's eyes and trying to get the child to identify the letters and then the words. Some children naturally notice letters in the world around them (in my experience these are usually girls). They just *see* those letters there in front of them and become curious. Paul never noticed. I watched him to see if he would, and he didn't.

What Paul noticed was bugs! He was always outdoors digging around, finding things that moved. The degree to which Paul notices bugs was evident one August when he returned home after spending a week at his grandmother's and came to me in wonder. "Mom! There's a new bug in the yard," he cried. "One I've never seen before!" Sure enough, the cicadas had appeared. He was fascinated. Bugs, yes; letters, no.

So at age 9, it was finally letters. "Good," I thought to myself. After all, the grandparents were getting nervous. But Paul didn't do it the way John did. He began reading his grandfather's primer, a beautiful little book that my dad used in first grade about sixty years ago. But Paul just could not keep his attention on reading. After a week or two of the primer, he was off to bugs again or something. If I suggested to him that he try reading, he wasn't interested.

A month or more would pass with absolutely no attention to reading. None. Then I would put a book in front of him, usually the primer, just to see where he was at. He would read a little bit to me (indulging Mom, here) and I would discover that he was reading at a more advanced level than the last time. But I knew he hadn't been practicing. He'd been climbing trees or falling out of them (he does that too! Head first last time – caught himself with his legs, he tells me. I don't want to know!).

Then came Paul's desire to go to school. My educational theory is "go where the child leads." I really did not want Paul to go to school, but I also did not want school to become some longed-for oasis, so off he went. He went to first grade at 9, when the other kids were 6 or 7. Paul happens to be somewhat short for his age, and he also has a very kind temperament. So he fit in just fine and had a good experience.

After about two weeks, he came home and said, "Geez, Mom, school is hard!" The kids were taking spelling tests every week, and though a number of them couldn't do it, they were expected to read at a level considerably beyond Paul's. He went at it with gusto, as Paul does with everything. But by the last week of school, he was happy to be done with it (he had gone in for the final 9 weeks of the term).

He had become a lot more conscious about reading, however. But summer was here. Who had time to read? So again, he stopped reading for several months. Occasionally, I would see him looking at a comic, and he loves Nancy Drew books (which he cannot read to himself yet) so when none of us would read them to him, he would try to read to himself. Usually, he ended up frustrated. Many of the words are just too hard for him still.

Paul is 10 now, and if he were in public school, he would not be reading at grade level. What Paul is doing, however, is spelling up a storm. Who would have imagined this? I never give spelling tests. But often when Paul and I are driving somewhere, he will begin to spell. It's as if being in the car, anchored in the seat belt, with no bugs or trees available, he stops looking outward and starts looking inward. He

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becomes quiet. I drift into my thoughts, he into his. Then in a little while, he will say, "Mom? Do you spell 'would' w-o-u-l-d?" I am surprised. I say, "Yes?!" and look at him. Then he says, "And the kind of wood, like a tree, is that spelled w-o-o-d?" Now I'm really surprised. Nobody taught him this. He's just percolating it up from within his own body-mind system. He's ready to spell.

I know that soon Paul will be reading as fluently as everybody else in the family. He said to me not long ago, "Mom, when I learn to read Nancy Drew, I'm going to read three books a day!" Because I love to write and need time to do that, I can hardly wait! But somehow I suspect that those bugs and other creatures will give Nancy Drew some stiff competition.

Mom Learns from Daughter's Poetry

Jane Valencia of California writes:

One day while in the garden, Amri (2 1/2 at the time) announced: "She has little black socks to go outside." Amri was speaking of our Halloween cat, spook, who had padded across the grass to us. Then Amri asked of her words, "Is that a rhyme?"

"It certainly sounds like a poem," I said.

Amri went on from there, adding to her poem. She paused after each phrase and even repeated them for me. I snatched up a pen and paper, wrote down what she'd said, then read it back to her. She repeated a few of the lines, correcting me (or perhaps changing the words) at a couple of points. I then arranged her words in a way I thought conveyed the rhythm of her poem:

Amri's Poem

She has little black paws
to go outside

She jumps over
and walks over

Riddle me, riddle me
garden again

Since she first began speaking, I've kept an ear open towards Amri's words. I kept lists of the words she learned, then phrases. Eventually Amri's repetition of what she was hearing turned to her own exploration with language, and a playing with the sounds of words. I continued to write what she said, delighting in how she expressed herself and in her amazing confidence in doing so. I loved (and love) how easily she uses common words in uncommon ways and how naturally she'll invent new words to suit the meaning she wishes to convey (for instance, she recently said to Spook, whose eyes were glowing in the dark, "Your eyes are *greenmelding*"). But it wasn't until Amri announced her garden poem that I began to *hear* her words as poetry.

Now whenever Amri speaks in a way that captures my ear, I not only write down her words but arrange them into poems. I usually read them back to her, either to confirm that what I wrote was what she said or just to have her hear her poem. I try as much as possible to be sensitive to Amri's feelings regarding how her poetry is used. Sometimes she doesn't want me to read her words back to her, and very occasionally she's annoyed when she sees me writing what she's saying. She doesn't like me to read her poetry aloud to others. These are her words, so I need to give her the respect regarding them that a poet of any age deserves.

It has been fascinating to see her love of language continue to develop and flower, and to work to express it on paper as the poetry it is. At times her images astonish me, such as with this poem, spoken at the time that Comet Hale-Bopp was visible (two months after her first poem, above):

Ancients

I am looking at ancients
up in the sky at night

I'm seeing stars and a bridge
up in the sky at night

We could fly some balloons
We could have some parachutes
We could have some soup

There was an ancient up in the sky
Southward they fly

Frequently I draw her poems from her play, as in this one taken from her play while eating lunch one day (four months after "Ancients"):

Ah, here are some noodles —
drunken

They are from the sun

We'll have good
drunken noodles

Time for good noodles to eat
Time for good noodles to eat!

Oh Mama, do eat
this wonderful salad

And we will say, "Don't
eat it — it's ours.
It's a yummy salad
for us."

I enjoy seeing how phrases from stories or poems we've read together become part of her language. For instance, "riddle me, riddle me" in the first poem is from *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, and "Southward they fly" in the second is from a poem from *Ladybug* magazine. And I love the repetition and good humor of poems like the noodle poem.

While most of Amri's poetry comes from phrases I capture from her almost constant commentary, she will sometimes go over her words herself, delighting in the sound and ideas of them. She laughed over this one, then shared it with me, saying, "Here's my poem!"

Raspberry dabbleberries
Feel them under
my toes!

I try as much as possible not to edit or correct Amri's words, but no doubt I'm guilty of selective hearing at times. Of course, by arranging her words in poetic form I am further inflecting my own ideas about how and what she's saying. No matter. The important thing is that Amri and I are learning about poetry together. She sees and hears poetry as something

Benjamin (left) and Sarah Stewart enjoying the newspaper

that is part of what she can do, how she can express herself. Meanwhile I, as Amri's scribe and interpreter, am experiencing firsthand how to shape poems. I'm discovering the variety in which sounds and language can be expressed as poetry.

Although I write songs and poetic prose and have friends and relatives who are poets, I've rarely been able to shake the notion that writing poetry is a difficult and moody pursuit, a form of expression not for me. Thanks to Amri, I'm learning how spontaneous and joyous poetry-making can be. It's great to have her as my mentor!

The Newspaper Curriculum

Jan Stewart (SD) writes:

From a very young age, Benjamin, my oldest, took the reins and led us in his many discoveries and observations. At age 3, he commented that adding was just like making cookies: "You add the flour (number 3) to the sugar (number 4) and you get cookies (number 7). By the way, the equals sign is the 'spoon.'"

So it was no surprise when, at age 4, Benjamin discovered our first "curriculum guide." It arrived at our front door daily at a reasonable cost: the daily newspaper. Attracted by the large headline letters and colorful pictures, Benjamin began cutting out favorite pictures and gluing them to construction paper. With the help of a friend's plastic binding machine, these pages became our daily "current events" books. In the beginning, we simply cut out the pictures and placed them in the book, and then had a brief discussion about the content and why that picture was chosen. Now, as Benjamin, at 5, and his sister Sarah, at 3, grow in interest and understanding, our discussions cover topics ranging from geography to photography techniques to animal habitats. We have added many reference materials (such as a globe, an insect guide, and a wildflower guide) to our routine.

During one of Benjamin's picture searches, he discovered the weather page. Fueled by his budding love of clouds and thunderstorms, looking at the weather page became his favorite activity. The five-day forecast has mini picture cues, which were quickly assigned for Sarah to "read," followed by Benjamin's forecast of daily temperatures. To his report he now added information such as "yesterday's high and low," "record high and low," and daily temperatures from cities around the country.

In October, Benjamin decided to chart daily temperatures on a bar graph so he could easily see and compare them. Benjamin quickly discovered that the forecasted temperatures and actual temperatures were not always the same. He took great delight in announcing, "They were wrong again, Mom!" during his morning broadcast. From this foundation, we have studied clouds, their names and significance; chased thunderstorms; learned about hail and weather forecasting instruments, including Doppler radar. Further plans include a visit to the National Weather Service and a study of state temperature averag

Our most recent newspaper d covery has been a special feature on our Community page. Historical pho-

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tos dating back to 1890 have been featured on a daily basis. Many a laugh and ooh and aah follow our investigation of these old-time photos. Our day usually includes a visit to the same corner of town, or building site, or lake to take comparative present-day photos. Thus begins our "history studies."

It is intriguing for us to see our children's excitement and interest in the newspaper since they both discovered it as non-readers. They have expanded our view of written material once thought to be for adults or at least advanced readers.

Hiking with Older Friends

Erin Hughey-Commers of Virginia writes:

I love homeschooling because it allows me to experience life in its hearty, unrefined form. Sometimes the classes, jobs, and people that come my way are simply valuable one-time experiences. Other times they lead to something else, which in turn gives way to yet another thing, in an exciting succession of events that eventually may write whole chapters of my life. This to me is life in its random, perfectly crafted way of opening doors that could ultimately lead to whole careers and lifestyles or simply give my panoramic camera of the world a gentle spin. Many times it is hard to say which has been more valuable in an experience: the concentrated bit of knowledge that would be deemed "learning" in school, or the exposure to an angle of life that challenges me to fit another piece into the jigsaw puzzle of who I am.

One of my favorite episodes has centered around a group of older women who have brought new dimensions to my enjoyment of the out-of-doors and proved to me the invigorating idea that age does not have to sap one's physical ability or love of learning.

Aware of my passion for hiking, an acquaintance gave my name to a friend of his who had been bitten by the same bug. When I met Ms. Heyward, I had hiked surprisingly few of the mountains that surround my home in the Blue Ridge foothills, and I knew only the name of one of the tallest summits in the area. Since then, my knowledge has steadily expanded, taking in the local geography and the trails that entwine it.

At the beginning of each hike that we go on together, Ms. Heyward hands topographical maps out to me and my equally hike-hungry friends, our route marked in ink. From the hard-earned, blissful heights of ridge tops, we recognize with amazement a familiar wooded line and realize how close all our fav-orite mountains are to each other, and we, wherever we are, to them. Living in the valleys, we see the landscapes in chopped-up views limited by perspective, images of distance always contained inside the frame of something closer. From the higher elevations it's all connected, one continuous range of ridge beyond ridge that finally becomes part of the sky on the horizon. (This is a wonderful metaphor for the freedom of vision and experience that homeschooling provides.)

Ms. Heyward always has room in the car for my friends, and nearly every time we walk together she brings at least one or two friends of her own – active, inquisitive older women like herself. One is from England; another sometimes remarks that a plant or the terrain reminds her of South Africa, where she used to live. Their accents alone are wonderful to listen to, but it is their knowledge of and reverence for nature that stays with me the longest. Their constant attention to and identification of trailside plants inspired me to learn more, and with the aid of a few books from the library I have acquainted myself with local wildflowers. It is very exciting to be able to ask Ms. Heyward and her friends questions that my books can't answer. And, appreciative of my interest, they are prompted to show me more. Our walking formation changes as we progress, so that at the end of a hike I have had the chance to talk with everyone individually or in a small group, our topics ranging from Maine to William Faulkner.

I think the most important thing for my friends and me about the experience has been the fact that people fifty and sixty years apart were spending time together. It seems to me that if school is designed to prepare one for life, it falls short when it fails to

Erin with Ms. Heyward

foster an environment in which kids are able to experience adults on a relatively equal basis. Through time spent to-gether in a relaxed way, a child would come to understand her elders (and vice-versa), her respect for them tran-scending their mandated titles. This would not only prepare them for a time when they will share the adult world with these people, but would also develop a cross-generational trust that our society painfully lacks. My hikes with Ms. Heyward have been one of many such experiences that homeschooling has allowed me.

Every time I return from one of our expeditions I glow with images of the land, words we have spoken, and the feeling of fulfillment I get from spending half a day on a mountain with people who love nature and hiking as much as I do. It is a way for me to step back from the routine of every day and gaze across the landscape of years ahead, filling in the gap of time between my companions and me to bridge the span of human life. Everything is complete. It is both the metaphorical and quintessential homeschooling experience.

Teen Helps with Reading

Sarabeth Matilsky (NJ) writes:

Recently, a local homeschooling mom asked me if I would work with her 9-year-old daughter Anna on reading and writing. We work together once or twice a week for two hours. We almost always start with me reading a chapter or two of a book aloud. Then Anna reads aloud to me, and it's great for me to watch how she improves each time we meet. A fascinating thing I've observed is how well Anna can read in context. Several weeks ago I was reading to her, and when I was right in the middle of a page I asked her to read to me for a minute. She read an entire paragraph, hardly stumbling at all and reading with expression and style. When she had previously attempted to read similar passages out of context, it had been frustrating for her.

Our read-aloud sessions are good for *me* in ways that I hadn't anticipated at the beginning. My own reading-aloud has improved, since I have to really understand the grammatical structure of sentences so that I can enunciate and put stresses on the correct words without stumbling.

We also write together, and we've found ways to do it that are fun for both of us. Anna has written lots of short stories with me in the role of typist. For several weeks, we did a "to be continued" story, taking turns picking up the thread of the plot. We also make up stories about crazy pictures that we draw together.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to watch how Anna learns and to learn from her. It is constantly challenging for me as I try to understand exactly what she wants and needs my role to be. I don't want to offer her so much help that she feels condescended to, and yet I don't want her to feel overwhelmed; I don't want to push her too far and act like a school teacher, and yet I want to pick up on her signals when she does want me to push her even if she's saying no. ◆

From Homeschool to College and Work

A book **by Alison McKee**, a mother with 20 years of homeschooling experience.

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Resources & Recommendations

Books in Brief

I'd like to recommend a book called **Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting,** by Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn. It's not technically a book for homeschoolers, but in many ways it is more useful to us than some of the specific "how-to" guides. Those of us who have chosen not to entrust our children, their learning and growing, their hearts and souls, into the cement arms of the compulsory education system, have jumped with both feet into what the Kabat-Zinns call "the arduous and deep spiritual practice of parenting." This is our work, and this is what this book is about.

At GWS's 20th anniversary conference, one of the speakers said, "It's not how we teach our children, but how we treat our children." I agree. It is a daily challenge to be mindful of our words, our tone, and our behavior. Our children learn most from who we are and what we do.

It seems to me that among homeschooling parents, there is a high proportion of us who grew up in less-than-nourishing homes. Perhaps the pain blessed us with the courage to be different. For myself, I can say that as a child I almost lost my soul trying to fit into an insane environment. What did I have to lose, as a parent, by jumping off the cliff of following my own heart? At least I was bringing my heart with me. But those of us with such histories also wrestle in our parenting with reactions and behaviors that are rooted in the past. It is a tremendous effort not to repeat the past and yet to accept who we are and our own limitations.

The Kabat-Zinns say that the only way to nourish our children is to grow ourselves, and that the "full seeing" of our children is necessary both for their development and for our own. When I have the grace to be in the moment and see the beauty and wonder of my children, I know there is no more important work worth doing. Mindful and respectful parenting is, I believe, the most important work for world peace and transformation. If you believe this, too, but often feel undervalued and unappreciated, you will savor this book. It is a balm for the soul and a book I plan to read over and over again. – *Andy Migner (MA)*

I've read all of Daniel Quinn's books, which include **Ishmael, Providence,** and **The Story of B.** They're all part of the same story, which is, basically, about a gorilla named Ishmael teaching willing pupils the history of the universe in order to help them save the world. It is an environmental message, but I guarantee it is not like others you have heard. What does this have to do with homeschooling? Well, in *Providence,* which is the autobiography Quinn wrote to explain how he evolved his ideas for Ishmael, he touches on education just a bit. He says that he envisions an ideal educational setting as one in which children and adults are free to move about in different real-life situations to learn what they want or need at the time.

I e-mailed the author and encouraged him to read John Holt's books. I am not so big-headed that I believe my suggestion to read John Holt influenced his current book, **My Ishmael,** but I am flabbergasted at what is in that book. It is a fictional account of John Holt's ideas!

Ishmael is critical of schools, and when asked how children will learn to read, he says, "The same way they learned how to speak, by being around speaking people. In other words, they learn to read by being around reading people. I know you've learned not to have any confidence in this process. I know you've been taught that this is something best left to 'the professionals,' but in fact, the professionals have a very doubtful record of success."

When asked in the "Unschooling the World" chapter if he would be in favor of something like home schooling, he says, "I'm not in the least in favor of home schooling. Julie [his pupil]. ... Schooling of any kind is unnecessary and counterproductive in human children. Children no more need schooling at age 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 than they need it at age 2 or 3, when they effortlessly perform prodigies of learning. ... Children don't need schooling. They need access to what they want to learn – and that means they need access to the world outside the home."

Well, these few quotes don't do the book justice, but I hope readers will be intrigued enough to explore further. In addition to Quinn's books, there are several Ishmael web pages (search for "Ishmael" or "Daniel Quinn"). – *Leslie Moyer (OK)*

Girls and Young Women Entrepreneurs, by Frances A. Karnes and Suzanne M. Bean, is the newest book from Free Spirit Publishing, the folks who publish *The Kid's Guide to Social Action* and other books that focus on young people's experiences and voices. The book's subtitle is "True Stories About Starting and Running a Business Plus How You Can Do it Yourself," and the stories include: a 14-year-old who sells her own watercolors, a 13-year-old who sells her own invention: gloves that keep the wrists and lower arms warm, two sisters who run a pet-sitting business, two other sisters whose business is their traveling magic act, an 18-year-old who created a youth-administered environmental organization, and a 17-year-old who runs a store that sells products to help people with disabilities (that's Emily Bergson-Shilcock, a homeschooler whose story GWS readers might recognize).

Though the book obviously focuses on female young entrepreneurs, with the goal of offering examples and inspiration to girls who might not see such examples elsewhere in their lives, the stories so delightfully show the range of businesses young people can run that I hope boys interested in starting their own business will read the book too. In many ways it's a more grown-up version of Holt Associates' *Earning Our Own Money* booklet, with advice, a list of further reading and organizations to contact, and a glossary of business-related terms as well. – Susannah Sheffer ◆

Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our complete 1998 Directory was published in GWS #120.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those who ask to be listed, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H),** the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Carolyn McCARTER & David RIBAKOFF (Hava/86, Simha/88, Yonatan/90, Rahamim/92, Nehemya/94, Moshe/97) 1432 Sebastian Way, Sacramento 95864 (change) ••• Liz O'BRIEN (Mary/89, Robert/92, John/93, Michael/97) 244 Roundhill Pl, Clayton 94517 ••• James VOISIN & Luisa De PAIVA (Danielle/91, Nastacia/92, Octavia/95) 5323 Hillflower Dr, Livermore 94550

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Kristine POE (Luisa/90) 1524 Robbins St, Santa Barbara 93101-4733 (change)

CO — Terry & Kathy COLBERT (Sarah/82, Samantha/86, Julia/92) 661 Parliament Ct, Ft Collins 80525-5864 (change) ••• Janet COURSLEY (Nico/94) 103 Stackyard Ln, Basalt 81621 **(H)**

CT — Brigid DONOHUE & Paul CHILL (Madeline/94, Camille/96) 28 Arnoldale Rd, W Hartford 06119 **(H)** ••• Frank MENNITI & Sandra MILLER (Peter/90, Christina/93) 10 Reynolds Hill Rd, Mystic 06355

IL — Jim & Becky RAUFF (Andy/89) 111 S Westdale Av, Decatur 62522

KS — Cathleen McMAHON (Sara/90, Luke/92) 1225A Rhode Island St, Lawrence 66044

LA — Judy & Mick GAMBOA (Miguel/81, Sarah/84) PO Box 312, Harvey 70059-0312 (change)

ME — Jim BERGIN & Judy GARVEY (Matthew/77, Daniel/80) RR 1 Box 3215, Blue Hill 04614 **(H)** ••• Alice & Brian SCHUTH (Sam/92, Henry/94, Frank/96) 162 Water St, Eastport 04631 **(H)**

MA — Suzanne & Roger MacDONALD (Hannah/91, Emma/94) 24 Warner St, Hudson 01749 ••• William & Kristin MOORE (Hayden/91) 122 E Washington St, Hanson 02341-1137 **(H)**

MI — Dan & Laurie LANG (Ben/76, Nik/78, Zach/82, Laurie Beth/88) 9834 Marshall, S Lyon 48178

MT — Stephanie & Jeff EBERHARDT (Courtney/89) 1003 Taft St, Thief River Falls 56701 **(H)** ••• Josie & Bill PRENTISS (girl/91, boy/95) 1130 Mtn View Dr, Missoula 59802

NH — Erda GRASS & Michael COWART (Cedar/87) PO Box 61, N Sandwich 03259

NJ — Tim & Lillian HAAS (Alex/92, Ben/97) 141 Oakland Av, Audubon 08106 **(H)** ••• Linda WARD (Christopher/83, Andrew/86, Brian/87) PO Box 1363, Hightstown 08520 ••• Janet SIMMONS & Jan EDLER (Cory/87, Riley/91, Cally/94) 11 Wethersfield Dr, Plainsboro 08536

NY — Diane & Robbie PAUL (Robbie/92) PO Box 2036, N Babylon 11703 ••• Kathy RICHARDSON (Samantha/84) 154 Pearl St, Corning 14830 **(H)**

OH — Kevin & Holly RAINWATER (Gabriel/88, Daniel/90) 24514 Twp Rd #167, Fresno 43824 **(H)**

OR — Mark & Roni JOHNSTON (Jaeger/94) 1160 NW 178 Av, Beaverton 97006 **(H)** ••• Dana & Gary GUMANOW (Ethan/89, Nora/91, Caleb/95) 313 SE 27 Av, Portland 97214 (change) **(H)**

TN — Stefani LETO & Eric ANGSTADT (Sarafina/95) 3217 Ellis St, Knoxville 37920-3209 **(H)**

TX — Susan SMYLIE (Galen/93, Harlan/96) 562 Cherry Ridge, Floresville 78114 ••• Lisa & Jimmy LaLONDE (Gabrielle/90, Dylan/93, Elijah/96) 598 Red Berry Rd, Seguin 78155 **(H)**

VA — Brenda ETHEREDGE (Elijah/91, Imani/92) Twin Oaks Community, 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa 23093 **(H)**

WA — Lisa & Chris CONYERS (Hallie/91, Kyle/92) 2293 Otter Pond Dr, Mt Vernon 98274 **(H)**

WV — Mary Beth & John STENGER (John/89, Bob/91, Frank/93) Rt 1 Box 44C, Lost Creek 26385 **(H)**

WI — Jodene & Patrick LeDENMAT (Catherine/95) 3112 Cozy Acres Rd, Racine 53406-5152 **(H)**

Canada:

ON — Simonne KALAU & Leo TAVORMINA (Celestia/94, Mahalia/96) 20009 Conc 6 Kenyon Twp RR #5, Alexandria K0C 1A0 **(H)** ••• Roy & Susan BRADBURY (Sarah/81, Lucy/84) 74 South Oval, Hamilton L8S 1R1 ••• Lisa FANNIN & Tony HAMILTON (Willy/87, Austin/90, Forrest/93, Clover/97) 797 Manning Av, Toronto M6G 2W7 **(H)**

YT — Jann & Tim BAIN (Kyrstin/89, Kerynne/93) PO Box 1457, Dawson City, Yukon Y0B 1G0 (change)

Other Locations — Eugene & Barbara GREGOR (Alexander/89, Sonia/92, Hanna/95) Burnside Estate #B4, 9 South Bay Rd, Repulse Bay, **Hong Kong** (change) ••• Nadine STEWART (Adeline/92, Luduline/95) L'Ecole a la Maison, 6 Grande Rue, 38660 Le Touvet **France (H)** ••• Elisabeth & Giorgio VAZZA (Mario/91, Andrea/93, Nicola/97) Via Corba Masiera 7, 32100 Belluno, **Italy (H)** ••• Yvonne & Gunnar JARL (Daniel/80, Linus/87, Matilda/88, Anna/90) Bjorksater, S-640 34 Sparreholm, **Sweden** ••• Larry & Erin HAAS (Nyita/95) Box 37, St John **Virgin Islands** 00381 **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations (in GWS #120):

MD: Prince George's Home Learning Network, 3730 Marlborough Way, College Park 20740; Jacqui Walpole 301-935-5456; Sydney Jacobs 301-431-1838

NY: APPLE (Attachment & Positive Parenting & Lovingly Educating) Family and Homeschool Group, PO Box 2036, N Babylon 11703; 516-243-1944; email lillights@aol.com

Address Changes:

OH: Homeschool Network of Greater Cincinnati, 2115 Harcourt Dr, Cincinnati 45244; 513-683-1279 or 513-772-9579

PA: Diversity United in Homeschooling, 215-428-3865 (new phone # only)

Nat'l: Home Education Magazine, PO Box 1587, Palmer AK 99645-1587; phone 907-746-1336; fax 907-746-1335

Delete:

NE: NE Independent Homeschoolers Network; Omaha Project for Education and Nurturing

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1998 Directory (GWS #120)? Yes ___ No ___

Or in the additions in this issue? Yes ___ No ___

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Complete 1998 Lists of Resource People

Once a year we print our complete lists of helpful teachers, lawyers, professors, psychologists, school districts, and resource people. As with our Directory of Families, we print additions and changes to these lists throughout the year, so please continue to send them in. If you're sending us a change of address for a subscription, please let us know if you're on one of these lists so we can change it here, too. We're always interested to know whether people appreciate having this information available, so do let us know whether these lists are being used.

Certified Teachers

These teachers are willing to offer help and guidance to homeschooling families as needed, such as when state regulations require an evaluation from a certified teacher.

AK - Andy & Deb BYDLON, General Delivery, Big Lake AK 99652; 907-892-9012 (early childhood, elem., special ed.)

AZ - Kathleen M. KNEZ, Western Navajo Reservation, PO Box 889, Tuba City 86045; Special Ed

CA, South (zips to 94000) - Tutu ANDERSON, 6949 Fisk Av, San Diego 92122; 619-453-1086 ••• Karen BISHOP, N County Pl, 2204 El Camino Real, Suite 312, Oceanside 92054 ••• John BOSTON, 9942 Canyon Country Ln, Escondido 92026 ••• Michelle BUSH, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042; 818-951-7744 ••• Sandy DOERFEL, PO Box 301331, Escondido 92030 ••• Sarah LESLIE, 1846 N Edgemont #6, Los Angeles 90027; 213-662-5571

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) - Margaret ARIGHI, 6015 Mauritania Av, Oakland 94605; 415-653-5098 ••• Karen CANTO, 21023 Lynn Ln, Sonora 95370 ••• Marilyn DeVORE, 4273 Forbestown Rd, Oroville 95966 ••• Carol CRESTETTO, 29 Taft Ct, Novato 94947 ••• Jasmin GERER, 414 Emeline Av, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-423-8311 ••• Roy SHIMP, 2164 E Bellevue Rd, Merced 95340 ••• Cheryl STEVENS, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette 94549 (K-12, special ed) ••• Scott YOUNG, Charlotte's Web, 1207-F Bridgeway, Sausalito CA 94965; 415-332-2244

CO - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM) ••• Sandra GUENTHER, 2923 Sunset Dr, Golden 80401; English, Spanish, French

CT - Geoffrey SMITH, 365 Bellevue Rd, New Haven 06511; 203-787-5659; Eng, math, 7-12, admin

FL - Thelma SEYFERTH, 10914 130th Av N, Largo 33778; 813-585-4425 (Suzuki violin & piano) ••• Charlotte THIEN, 12201 Old Kings Rd, Jacksonville 32219; 904-768-0472 ••• Roger TRUNK, Rt 1 Box 110, Satsuma 32189; 904-649-4479

HI - Debbie KUKAHIKO, FAMILY ACADEMY, 72-3960 Hawaii Belt Rd, Kailua-Kuna 96740

IL - Suzanne BALDWIN, 1452 Andover Dr, Aurora 60504; 708-851-0538 (K-12 music)

IA - Richard & Sharon CARGIN, 25 6th Av NE, LeMars 51031 ••• Rita EBELING, 324 Crescent Ln, Ft Madison 52627

IN - Marie DUSING, FAMILY ACADEMY, Rt 1 Box 509, Poland 47868; 812-986-2884

ME - Kathi KEARNEY, Box 69, New Sharon 04955; ME & VT K-12 ••• LouAnna PERKINS, Pierce Pond, RR-1 Box 22-C, Penobscot, ME 04476 (K-8) ••• Kristie SIMKO, PO Box 430, Mt Desert ME 04660 (elem.)

MD - Frances MOYER, 4017 William Ln, Bowie 20715

MA - George FOURNIER, RFD 2 Box 101, Brimfield 01010 (French) ••• Adele GARLICK, 96 Coolidge Cir, Northborough 01532 ••• George HECHT, 4 High Ledge Av, Wellesley 02181; 617-235-4246 ••• Thomas MAHER, 30 Park St, Wakefield 01880; 617-245-7634 ••• Faith Jones OZAN, 9 Tilehurst Ln, Marblehead 01945 ••• Mario PAGNONI, 76 Emsley Ter, Methuen 01844 ••• Denise STANLEY, 3 Alhort Dr., Apt. 3, Woburn 01801; 617-932-9281 ••• Sharon TERRY, 23 Mountain St, Sharon 02067; 617-784-8006 ••• Linda ZUERN, Box 619, 5 Depot Rd, Cataumet 02534

MI - Kathy DONAHUE, Box 80-B S Superior Rd, Atlantic Mine 49905; K-12 ••• Bonnie MIESEL, 1111 Cricklewood SW, Wyoming 49509 ••• Dinah MORRISON, 76 Latta St, Battle Creek 49015; 7-12 ••• Muriel PALKO, 321 N William, Ludington 49431; K-12

MN - Jeanne BOURQUIN, 1568 McMaham Blvd, Ely 55731 ••• Linda WINSOR, 1927 James Ave, St. Paul 55105

NH - Sally EMBER, 284 Water St, Keene 03431 (multicultural education) ••• Tracey A. Hanley, 10 Louisburg Cir, Exeter 03833; 603-772-0322 (porfolio assessment; English; Math)

NJ - Sandy MADKIFF, MINOTOLA ACTIVITY CTR, 207 Coari Av, Minotola 08341; 609-697-1643; K-12 Eng

NM - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM)

Lawyers

CT - Frank Cochran, 51 Elm St, PO Box 1898, New Haven 06508-1898; 203-865-7380 ••• George J. Duhaime, 263 Randall Rd, Lebanon 06249; 860-889-9775

FL - Charles Baron, 167th and NE 6th, NO. 815, N. Miami Beach 33160; 305-770-1410 ••• James R. Wells, 3837 Quail Ridge Dr, Boynton Beach 33436, 407-734-5068

HI - Tom DiGrazia, DiGrazia Law Office, PO Box 1780, Kailua 96734

ID - Lyle Eliasen, 202 Idaho St, American Falls 83211; 208-226-5138 ••• Michael Cressler, 414 S Jefferson, Moscow 83843; 208-883-1505

IA - Craig Hastings, 315 6th St, Ames 50010; 515-232-2501

KS - Austin Kent Vincent, 2222 Pennsylvania Av, Topeka 66605; 913-234-0022

MD - Ray Fidler, 805 Tred Avon Rd, Baltimore 21212; 410-296-6495 ••• Paul Kimberger, 3905 Bexley Pl, Marlow Hghts 20746; 301-899-6933 ••• Dale R. Reid, 7091 Brangles Rd, Marriottsville 21104

MA - Eugene Burkart, 267 Moody St, Waltham 02154; 617-899-5327 ••• Susan Ostberg, 41 Warren Av, Harvard 01451; 508-456-8515

MI - Penelope Kozminski, 6650 Tanglewood SE, Grand Rapids 49546-7256; 616-942-4638 ••• Norm Perry, 8976 US 31, PO Box 241, Berrien Spgs 49103; 616-471-2848

NY - Seth Rockmuller, 29 Kinderhook St, Chatham 12037; 518-392-4277

OH - David A. Haffey, 3055 Rodenbeck Dr, Dayton 45432-2662 ••• James Peters, 107 W. Court St, Woodsfield 43793; 614-472-1681

OR - Kim Gordon, 6501 SW Macadam Av, Portland 97201; 503-452-9595

PA - Mark Semisch, 56 Warden Rd, Doylestown 18901

VA – Nancy LeSourd & George Grange II, 8280 Greensboro Dr, 7th Fl, McLean VA 22102

WI - Jack Umpleby, N96W18221 County Line Rd, Menomeonee Falls 53051-1300

WY - Gerald Mason, PO Box 785, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2134 ••• William H. Twichell, PO Box 1219, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2414

Professors

The following people are willing to help homeschooling families in developing curriculum, evaluating progress, or in other ways:

Larry Arnoldsen, Box 10 McKay Bldg, Brigham Young U, Provo UT 84602

Graham Ashworth, 423 Fox Chapel Rd, Pittsburgh PA 15238; 412-963-8800

Prof. Robert A. Carlson, College of Ed, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada S7N OWO

Sandy Doerfel, PO Box 301331, Escondido CA 92030

Juanita Haddad, Consultant in Free Range Learning and Deschooling, RR 7, Duncan BC V9L 4W4, Canada

Robert E. Kay, MD, PO Box C, Paoli PA 19301; 215-359-7885

J. Gary Knowles, Program in Educational Studies, School of Ed, U of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI 48109-1259

Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester MA 01524; 617-892-8012; certified school psychologist & social worker.

Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891

Michael J. Murphy, Assoc. Prof., U. of Saskatchewan, College of Education, Saskatoon, Sask., Canada S7N 0W0

Dr. Robert Newman, Assoc Prof Emeritus,

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Teacher Education, Syracuse U, 137 Hughes Pl, Syracuse NY 13210

Seymour Papert, email papert@media.mit.edu

Sam B. Peavey, Ed.D., 2307 Tyler Ln, Louisville KY 40205; 502-459-2058

Edward Pino, 189 Antelope Tr, Parker CO 80134

Richard Prystowsky, Professor of English and Humanities, Irvine Valley College, 5500 Irvine Ctr Dr, Irvine CA 92720

Brian D. Ray, National Home Education Research Institute, Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Dr SE, Salem OR 97301-9392

Mitchel Resnick, MIT Media Lab, 20 Ames St, Cambridge MA 02139; email mres@media.mit.edu

Jack Robertson, 532 Laguardia Pl #398, New York NY 10012-1428

Gary L. Stevens, University of San Francisco, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549

Seymour Treiger, Ed.D., RR 3 Yellow Pt Rd, Ladysmith, BC V0R 2E0, Canada

Chester S. Williams, ETSU, Box 5518, Texarkana TX 75501; 214-838-5458

Psychologists

Homeschoolers seeking counseling or guidance for a child or for the family tell us that they wish they could find psychologists or therapists who won't immediately be prejudiced against homeschooling. The following psychologists are familiar with homeschooling and, in many cases, supportive of it as well.

CA - Michelle Bush, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042 ••• Mary Ann Hutchison, 3409 Greenwood Av, Los Angeles 90066; 310-281-7711 ••• Hal Jindich, 191 E El Camino #307, Mountain 94040; 415-969-9981

FL - Dr. Kimberly Kiddoo, 2506 Ponce de Leon Blvd, Coral Gables 33134; 305-442-8500

MA - Neal Katz, 3 Central Ave, Newton 02160-1706; 617-332-7262 ••• Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester 01524 (certified school psychologist and social worker) ••• Dr. Susan Ott, 110 N Main, Petersham 01366; 508-939-2161,e xt. 2205 ••• Paul Shafiroff, Ed.D., Director of Guidance, Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257 ••• Dr. Paul Daniel Shea, 1450 Beacon St, Suite 801, Brookline 02146; 617-277-4214

NY - Emily Shapiro, 350 Central Park West, Suite 1F, New York NY 10025; 212-774-4156 (psychotherapy, counseling)

OH - Richard George, 1201 30th St NW, Canton 44709

PA - Dr. Bob Conroy, 1724 Smoky Corners Rd, Williamsport 17701

TX - Steven Gutstein, PhD, One West Loop, Suite #215, Houston 77027; 713-621-7496

WA - Holy Family Institute, 43 Frontier Rd, Appleton WA 98602 (counselors)

CANADA - Jan Hunt, 132 Bullock Creek Rd., Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2L3

School Districts

The following is a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with homeschoolers, and who are willing to be listed in GWS as doing so. There are many more cooperative districts around the country than there are districts on this list, and we have printed several stories in back issues of GWS about cooperation between schools and homeschoolers. If you are interested in seeing this material, place an order and ask us to send you back issues with material on this topic. Back issues are $3 each plus $3 per order for subscribers; $6 each for nonsubscribers.

Do bear in mind that not all states require homeschooling families to work with local school districts; in fact, many do not. Nonetheless, a cooperative school district may give homeschooling families access to events or materials even if they are not legally required to approve of or evaluate those families.

We only list school districts under the following conditions: (1) The family has to be not just satisfied but pleased with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. (2) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

CA - Butte County Office of Education, 2120 B Robinson, Oroville CA 95965, James H. Scott, Principal, Home School Program

Lodi Unified School District, 835 W Lockford St, Lodi 95240; 209-369-7411; Don Shalvey, Asst. Supt. - Instruction K-12

Loma Prieta School District, 23800 Summit Rd, Los Gatos 95030; 408-353-2389; Dr. Kenneth Simpkins, Superintendent; Dr. Ruth Bothne, Independent Home Study Program Director

Marysville Joint Unified, 1919 B St, Marysville 95901.

Monterey County Office of Education, 901 Blanco Circle, PO Box 80851, Salinas 93912; Bill LaPlante, Director of Alternative Programs

Mt Shasta Union School District, 601 E Alma St, Mt Shasta 96067; 916-926-3846; Carolyn Briody, Home School Coordinator

Santa Cruz City Schools, Alternative Family Education, 536 Palm St, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-429-3806. Attn: Terry Jones.

FL - Student Services, Putnam Cty Schools, 200 S 7th, Palatka FL 32177; 904-329, 0538; contact John Milton, asst. Director

IL - Madison Junior High, Southern River Oak Dr, Naperville 60565; Mr. Vergo, Principal.

Naperville Central High School, 44 W Aurora Av, Naperville 60540; Mr. Paulsen, Principal.

(note: these are individual schools, not school districts.)

MA - Cambridge Public Schools, 159 Thorndike St, Cambridge 02141; 617-498-9233.

Chatham Public Schools, Chatham MA 02633; Supt. Vida R. Gavin

Lowell School District, 89 Appleton, Lowell 01852; 454-5431; James McMahon, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum Development.

Rockland Public Schools, Rockland 02370; Supt. Ronald P. Gerhart

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257; Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff, Thomas A. Consolati, Supt.

PA - Radnor Township School District, Administration Building, 135 S. Wayne Av, Wayne 19087; Dr. John A. DeFlaminis, Supt.

Resource People

The people listed below have experience with the following subjects and are willing to correspond with others who are interested. In many cases these subjects have been discussed in back issues of GWS, so if you are seeking information you can ask us to select the relevant issues for you. (Back issues are $3 each plus $3 per order for subscribers; $6 for nonsubscribers).

Adoption: Maureen Carey, 3 Fayette Park, Cambridge MA 02139 (adoptive nursing, interracial adoption) ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Marty Gylleck, 34356 State Rt 23, Genoa IL 60135 (interracial adoption) ••• Lenné Musarra, 6729 Sherri St, Juneau AK 99801-9443 ••• Derrick Simpson, 1535 W 114 Pl,

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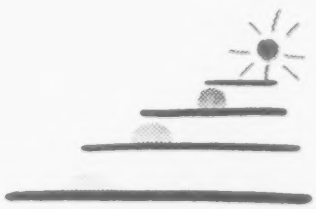

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Chicago IL 60643; 773-239-1725 (foreign adoption) ••• Reed & Chris Sims, RD 2 Box 34, Jericho VT 05465; 802-899-4507 (interracial adoption) ••• Jenny Wright, Quaker City, H.C. 60, Box 50, Charlestown NH 03603; 603-543-0910

Autism: Cindy Gaddis, 928 Turnberry Dr, Richmond KY 40475; 606-624-3571 ••• Henry Lappen, 120 Pulpit Hill Rd #31, Amherst MA 01002; 413-549-3722 (Asperger's Syndrome) ••• Wendy Renish, W1562 Spencer Rd, Loyal WI 54446 ••• Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51st St, Indianapolis IN 46205

Blindness: Donald & Kathy Klemp (son/75) N6479 Kroghville Rd, Waterloo WI 53594 ••• Ruth Matilsky, 109 S 4th Av, Highland Park NJ 08904 ••• Alison McKee, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison WI 53705

Computers: Jack Loranger, MPO 17-R Krogstad Rd, Washougal WA 98671; 206-837-3760; "Electronic Educator" BBS #837-3299 ••• Mario Pagnoni, 76 Emsley Terr, Methuen MA 01844 ••• Theo Sherman, 2555 Collins Av #2303, Miami Beach FL 33140; 305-538-7162

Custody Disputes: Debbie Driscoll, 14503 SE 114th Pl, Renton WA 98059 (also single parents & gay & lesbian families) ••• Char Love, PO Box 2035, Guerneville CA 95446-2035. (We maintain a list of others with experience in this area who prefer not to list themselves publicly, and we will forward stamped letters to these people if asked.)

Down Syndrome: Elaine Bechtold, 10827 Rosedale Av N, Rt 1 Box 233, Loretto MN 55357-9793; 612-498-7553 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Heidi Jarvis, N8373 Center Rd, Gleason WI 54435; 715-873-4050

Gifted Children: Isabelle Nidever, 5917 Oak Av, Suite 176, Temple City CA 91780-2404; 818-287-8595

Ham Radio: Sheryl Schuff, 8156 Lieber Rd, Indianapolis IN 46260; 317-259-4778

Learning Disabilities: ••• Pose M.R. Boggs, 6223 Geronimo Cir, Anchorage AK 99504 ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Leslie McColgin, RR 1 Box 146, Cunningham KY 42035 (speech & language pathologist) ••• Chris Sims, RD 2 Box 34, Jericho VT 05465; 802-899-4507 ••• Cheryl & Gary Stevens, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549 (Special Ed., Chemical Sensitivity)

Mental Illness: Jennifer Rozens, 33411 Jefferson Av, St Clair Shores MI 48082

Montessori: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601 ••• Elizabeth Lower, 4875 Potomac Dr, Fairfield OH 45015

Physical Handicaps: Janna Books, Box 309-B, Route 2, Santa Fe NM 87505 ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Karen Franklin, 3939 Winfield Rd, Boynton Bch FL 33436 (C.P.) ••• Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891 ••• Lenné Musarra (see under Adoption) ••• Saunny Scott, 1901 Barker St, Lawrence KS 66044 ••• Derrick Simpson (see under adoption)

Single Parents: Debbie Driscoll (see under Custody Disputes) ••• Janet Hoffman, PO Box 288, Hamburg PA 19526-0288 ••• Diane McNeil, 3131 Cty EE, Baileys Harbor WI 54202 ••• Laura Pritchard, 25607 98th Pl So, Apt K-102, Kent WA 98031 ••• Lisa Spector; 203-677-2852 ••• Sally Sherman, 2555 Collins Av #2303, Miami Beach FL 33140; 305-538-7162 ••• Derrick Simpson (see under adoption ••• Karen Turner, PO Box 622, Redway CA 95560-0622 ••• Beth White, PO Box 3734, Eugene OR 97403; 541-935-5457

Traveling Families: Lois & Jim Blumenthal, 1132 Beechwood Dr, Hagerstown MD 21742-3007 ••• Louis & Jennifer Gordon, 10355 Grand Av, Bloomington MN 55420-5228 ••• Arlene Haight, 4150 So US #1, RD 2, Palm Bay FL 32905

Twins: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601

Grown-Up Homeschoolers

These former homeschoolers are now at college or involved in work, apprenticeships, or travel. In most cases, we list their parents' address because the homeschoolers' own addresses change often. In parentheses, we include a very brief description of what the person is doing or has done, and, where applicable, we have also listed the GWS issue in which a more complete description of the person's experience was published. Get in touch with these folks if you're interested in attending their college or exploring their field or if you're just interested in the perspective of a grown homeschooler.

Alazel Acheson, 2121 S Alaska, Tacoma WA 98405; 206-272-8124 (U. of Puget Sound, computer research and development)

Eleadari Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (teaching gymnastics; GWS #76)

Tia Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (School of Visual Concepts)

Elye Alexander, RR 1 Box 795, Craftsbury Common VT 05827 (Harvard University)

Mylie Alrich, PO Box 869, Greenville CA 95947; 916-284-6929 (restaurant work, real estate)

Ben Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (fiddler, EMT, expedition guide; GWS #86, #93)

Britt Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (published writer & poet; pilot; railroad engineer; runs piano studio; GWS #56, #60, #93)

Dan Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (cellist at Interlochen Arts Acad.; Oberlin Conservatory; directs farm program; GWS #79, #84, #93)

Jonah Barker 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (directs farm program; works with solar-powered technology, motorcycles)

Maggie Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (dogsledder, Search & Rescue, certified massage therapist; expedition guide; GWS #60, #81, #88, #91)

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, 314 Bryn Mawr Av, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; 610-527-4982 (U. of PA; library work; legal publishing; writing; GWS #97, #118)

Emily Bergson-Shilcock, 314 Bryn Mawr Av, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; 610-527-4982 (Beaver College; runs a store selling products to people with disabilities; GWS #115, #118)

Stephanie Bromfield, 1329 Blue Mtn Dr, Danielsville PA 18038; 215-767-3554 (community college; retail work)

Rebecca Cauthen, 260 Donald Lamb Rd, Moreland GA 30259 (Shorter College; GWS #97)

Amber Clifford, 475 NE 200, Knob Noster MO 65336 (Central MO State U; GWS #97)

Jeff Cohen, 160 Cornerstone Ln, Arroyo Grande CA 93420 (US Air Force Academy; GWS #81, #93)

Tamara Cohen, 160 Cornerstone Ln, Arroyo Grande CA 93420 (foreign exchange student, Agnes Scott College)

Mariama Congo, 97 Brayton Rd, Brighton MA 02135 (Goddard College; Mt. Holyoke College)

Josanna Crawford, 39175 NW Hidden Acres Ln, Cornelius OR 97113; 503-647-5485 (published poet; work with goats; travel; GWS #118)

Stephanie D'Arcangelo-Dalmer, 24 Ethan Allen Av #80, Colchester VT 05446; 802-654-7593 (motherhood; Goddard College; GWS #121)

Leonie Edwards, PO Box 75, Harrisburg OR 97446 (dentistry; GWS #110)

Michelle Edwards, PO Box 392, Harrisburg OR 97446 (runs photography studio; GWS #110)

Andrew Endsley, 4546 Willow Crest Dr, Toluca Lake CA 91602 (film directing; GWS #77, #97)

Luke Evans, 10755 Hibner Rd, Hartland MI 48353; 810-632-7424 (Civil Air Patrol; Washtenaw Community College; GWS #115)

Kendall Gelner, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia CO 80135 (Rice University, computer programming)

Anita Giesy, 4411 Colonial Dr, Norfolk VA 23508 (cross-country travel; dance; massage therapy; living in Spain; GWS #74)

Jeremiah Gingold, PO Box 74, Midpines CA 95345 (UC Santa Cruz; computer systems work)

Tad Heuer, 164 Norfolk St, Holliston MA 01746 (Brown Univ; work with public defender; GWS #102)

Gordon Hubbell, 3136 S 2000 W, Logan UT 84321 (factory worker, LDS missionary)

Bronwyn Jackson, 1000 Devil's Dip, Tallahassee FL 32308; 904-878-2793 (Wellesley College, U. of Virginia; GWS #96)

Gwyneth Jackson, 1000 Devil's Dip, Tallahassee FL 32308; 904-878-2793 (Wellesley College)

Beth Kaseman, 2545 Koshkonong Rd, Stoughton WI 53589 (conference organizing, developing non-profits, simple living)

Gretchen Kaseman, 2545 Koshkonong Rd, Stoughton WI 53589 (Int'l volunteer programs, fiber arts, conservation work)

Peter Kaseman, 2545 Koshkonong Rd, Stoughton WI 53589 (carpenter, juggler – holds Guiness World Record)

Vanessa Keith, HC 60 Box 50, Quaker City, Charlestown NH 03603 (farm work, travel; GWS #89, GWS #118)

Celia Kendrick 40 Brook St, Rehoboth MA 02769 (Rhode Island School of Design; animation work; GWS #75, #82)

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Anne Brosnan Lawson, 101 Joshua Circle Apt. 22, Berea KY 40403; 606-985-0054 (bluegrass music, library work, newspaper editing; GWS #109)

Ely Lester, PO Box 203, Joshua Tree CA 92252 (Rowland Heights Animation School)

Nathen Lester, PO Box 203, Joshua Tree CA 92252 (Mt. Shasta College - a recording engineering school)

Emily Linn, 9120 Dwight Dr, Detroit MI 48214 (U of Michigan)

Patrick Meehan, 1520 Briercliff Dr, Orlando FL 32806 (Software architecht, Nintendo, GWS #99)

Christian McKee, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison WI 53705 (fly tying; teaching radio and German, Kalamazoo College)

Christian Murphy, RD 6 Box 24, Wellsboro PA 16901 (Williams College; GWS #100)

Emily Murphy, RD 6 Box 24, Wellsboro PA 16901 (St. John's College; archivist work; GWS #89, #109, #118)

Emily Ostberg, PO Box 246, Harvard MA 01451 (apprenticeship with medicinal plants in Belize; Pomona College; GWS #96, #118)

Sonnet Pierce, 36001 Nathan Ln, Eldridge MO 65463 (travel, vegetarian cook, work with Student Conservation Assoc)

Sarah Pitts, 3143 Semmes St, East Pt GA 30347 (GWS #96)

Scott Pryor, 3228 Parsleys Mill Rd, Mechanicsville VA 23111; 804-779-2239 (Guilford College; study in Guatemala)

Jesse Richman, RD 2 Box 117, Kittanning PA 16201 (U of Pittsburgh Honors College; Semester at Sea; GWS #109)

Emma Roberts, RR 1 Box 81, Jewell Hill Rd, Ashby MA 01431; 508-386-7084 (theatre, American Repertory Theatre school; GWS #73, #76)

Erin Roberts, 925 Huffmaster Rd, Knoxville MD 21758 (Bethany College; 4-H; Congressional intern; GWS #109)

Kevin Sellstrom, PO Box 612, Wilton CA 95693; 916-687-7053 (special ed; Boy Scouts waterfront program & therapeutic horseback riding program; community college)

Mae Shell, RR 2 Box 289-C, Polly Hubbard Rd, St. Albans VT 05478, 802-524-9645 (library work, writing; web page design; GWS #109)

Sara Shell, RR 2 Box 289-C, Polly Hubbard Rd, St. Albans VT 05478, 802-524-9645 (Tisch School of the Arts at New York University)

Dawn Shuman, St. John's College, PO Box 2800, Annapolis MD 21404-2800 (GWS #100; #108)

Jamie Smith, 9085 Flamepool Way, Columbia MD 21045; 410-730-0073 (U. of Maryland/Baltimore; journalism; GWS #108, #113)

Lindsey Smith, 1712 Cliff Dr, Columbia MO 65201; 573-817-2243 (NE Missouri State U; U of NE; conservation work; community development)

Sarah Smith, 1712 Cliff Dr, Columbia MO 65201; 573-817-2243 (U of Missouri; work at therapeutic riding center)

Seth Smith, 1712 Cliff Dr, Columbia MO 65201; 573-817-2243 (NE Missouri State U, Central Methodist College, trail construction for U.S. Forest Service)

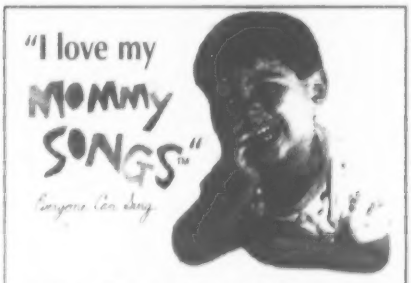
Jacob Spicer, RR 1 Box 15, Avoca WI 53506; 608-532-6365 (U. of Chicago, managing furniture store; GWS #89)

Jessica Spicer, RR 1 Box 15., Avoca WI 53506; 608-532-6365 (intern at Cato Institute in Washington, DC; GWS #95)

Kim Kopel Stewart, 319 N Mulberry St, apt G, Fayette MO 65248 (intern at living history village; massage therapy; GWS #87, #99, #118)

Laura Geiner Wiggett, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia CO 80135 (Colorado College; software analyst; GWS #89, #118)

Bo Yoder, 76 Beech Ridge Rd, Scarborough ME 04074; 207-883-9621 (game design; acoustical recording engineering; studying economics) ●



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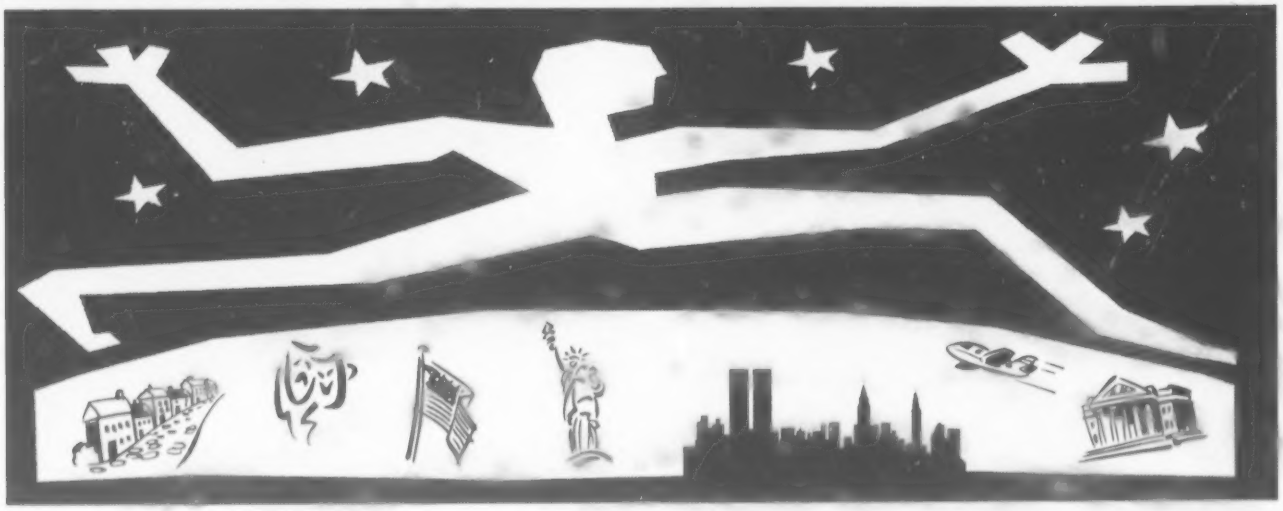

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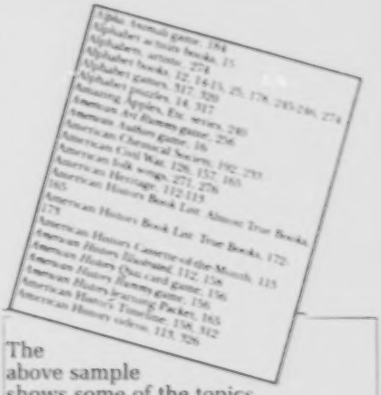

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Issue #122
May/June '98

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From the Editor

A few weeks ago I was a guest on a radio program about unschooling. That's right – it was specifically presented as a show about unschooling, not homeschooling. Is this good news? I'm not so sure. Gaining attention for the concept of learning without a curriculum *is* attractive. I understand that the desire to say to a reporter, "We're unschoolers, not homeschoolers" comes from a desire to emphasize interest-based learning and to preempt all the misleading assumptions that the word "homeschooling" generates. But I'm not convinced we're well served by speaking as if "homeschooling" and "unschooling" refer to two totally distinct activities.

In bringing this up, I'm *not* raising the general question of what people who learn outside of school should call themselves. I'm not asking which word is better or more descriptive in general. Rather, I'm suggesting that there are some drawbacks to speaking as if "homeschooling" and "unschooling" refer to distinct *and mutually exclusive* activities. My concerns are these:

• I don't want to surrender the word "homeschooling" to one particular group and imply that every time the word gets mentioned, it only refers to people who are, say, using a packaged curriculum. If the word "homeschooling" starts to connote something that specific, rather than the entire varied practice of having kids learn outside of school, what is a general reader to make of the headline, "Homeschoolers Gain Admission to Selective Colleges," for example? Does that mean unschoolers too? (In fact, it does. But would that be obvious if we have argued that unschooling refers to a distinct and separate practice?)

• What exactly does unschooling mean? What falls within its definition and what doesn't? The people who *call* themselves unschoolers are still sorting this one out. I'm not sure it always serves us well to throw the word out to reporters and to the general public when we're still defining it ourselves.

• On the radio program, every time I gave an example of something a self-described unschooler did, the host said,"But that sounds just like homeschooling!" Aha. The lines aren't as easy to draw as all that, and what most families do falls somewhere along a continuum, rather than firmly in one camp or another. I don't want a family who has been using a curriculum to have think, "Now we're taking the huge step of *becoming unschoolers*" whenever they decide to do something a bit more flexible.

Parents and children should describe themselves and their educational choices in whatever ways make most sense to them. But whatever word you start out by using, I think it will always take a few more words to convey the experience. I don't think we can avoid this – there's no single word which is so comprehensive and descriptive that it's unnecessary to explain further. We'll have to keep plugging away, explaining as clearly and vividly as we know how what the idea means in each of our lives.

– Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Debunking Myths for Legislators

Mary Beth Stenger (WV) writes:

West Virginia Home Educators Association holds an annual day at the legislature. Our activities include capitol tours, politicians' speeches supporting homeschooling, distributing folders of information to our individual legislators, and exhibiting a display prepared by homeschoolers for the legislators to see.

Last year, during the first legislative day I attended, I made the rounds to my delegates and Senators, and became upset when I came up against the tired old concerns about homeschooling that we've all had to address. I heard a delegate tell me that homeschoolers wouldn't be able to learn about different types of people like his children did (they attend Catholic school). Was he serious? Not only have my children met all types of people, but they get to know other families' households intimately, as most group meetings are held in other homeschoolers' homes. I can assure that delegate that homeschoolers meet more diverse personalities than children locked in school all day.

I went home discouraged about ever reaching these people. I mulled over this problem and thought about the many misconceptions people hold regarding homeschooling. I started thinking about how a picture is worth a thousand words, and my legislative display idea was born.

I decided to make a display, for the following year, designed to debunk the common myths about homeschooling, and I decided to do that by displaying pictures of homeschoolers from all over the state. I put an article in our state newsletter in which I enumerated the myths I was going to debunk and I asked homeschoolers to send me pictures which would work to debunk these myths.

I bought a three-sided display board from an office supply store and got stick-on letters in two sizes. I used the large size for my title, which was, "What is Homeschooling Like?" I agonized over this title. My favorite choice was, "A Pictorial Display Debunking Common Misconceptions Surrounding Homeschooling," but I decided that sounded more like a thesis than a legislative display.

Down the center, under the headline "Four Common Myths Surrounding Homeschooling," I listed the myths I had chosen to debunk: "Homeschoolers Have Little Interaction with Their Peers," "Homeschoolers are Unable to Learn from Adults Other Than Their Parents," "Homeschoolers Suffer Academically," "Homeschoolers are Isolated from Their Communities." Then, on the sides, I labeled each section with an assertion that countered each myth: "Homeschoolers Have Active Social Lives," "Homeschoolers Learn from a Variety of Instructors," "Homeschoolers Have Vast Academic Opportunities and Achievements," "Homeschoolers are Enthusiastic Participants in Their Communities." Under each headline, I pasted a collage of pictures relevant to that statement. I got a great response from my request in our state newsletter, so we had several pictures illustrating each idea. For the social life section, we had pictures of a homeschooling group tie-dying shirts, kids on a haywagon, girls in a dance studio. For the section about learning from different instructors, we had pictures of a boy with his violin teacher, two students with their karate instructor, and several pictures of sports teams. For the section about academic opportunities, the pictures were mostly of field trips (probably because that's easiest to show visually) – one was of families at a historic village, another of a family standing in front of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. There was also a photo of a boy at a science fair and one of a boy sitting in his living room surrounded by all the various projects he'd done that year. Finally, I added a newspaper clipping about a homeschooler who had won second place in a math competition we have here.

Last, for the section about involvement in the community, photos showed a boy playing piano at a group function, a library story hour, a baseball team, a costume party at a community center, a girl doing sign language interpreting at church.

I got a lot of positive feedback about this display and I enjoyed planning it, though putting it together was a bit stressful. The best part was seeing all the beautiful pictures of happy, thriving homeschoolers.

I've already got a plan for my next display: "A Year in the Life of a Homeschooling Family." This one, too, will be in pictures. I plan to display it at the legislature in the year 2000. In the meantime, for next year, I will revise my myth display, as I had permission from everyone to keep the pictures.

[SS:] Mary Beth's idea seems like a great way to counter those myths; maybe other groups can follow her example not just for legislative days but for library exhibits and other such community outreach efforts. Furthermore, if homeschoolers want to reach legislators or other officials with this kind of information but don't have the opportunity to present a visual display, fact sheets modeled on the same idea can work well too, using brief quotes (with or without photos). Though it's preferable to get quotes from local homeschoolers, GWS material has countered these myths throughout the years and readers are always welcome to order, and then quote from, our stories about homeschoolers getting involved in their communities, learning from other teachers, etc. , or to use these stories as models for assembling your own materials.

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Ontario Homeschoolers File Complaint Against School Boards

Kelly Green, formerly of the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents and now living in British Columbia, writes:

In February of this year, the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents filed an official complaint with the provincial ombudsman's office against the Ministry of Education and Training and local school boards (the ombudsman acts as a mediator between citizens and provincial government agencies). Ontario homeschooling families have been targeted for repeated harassment over the past several years by the Ministry of Education, to the point that some families have been forced to appear in court on trumped up charges of truancy of "causing their children not to attend school," without due process of law.

Among the abuses listed in the families' complaint were:

- misrepresentations of legal responsibilities of homeschooling parents to those parents and to the media by the Ministry and by school board officials
- demands on the part of school boards for, among other things, frequent home visits, unsupervised access to children in order to question them about homeschooling practices (demands which fall outside the requirements of the Ontario *Education Act*)
- abuse of the legal "inquiry" process outlined in the *Act* to determine satisfactory instruction on the part of homeschooling families (e.g. calling inquiries when there is no evidence that there is a need for such investigation)
- court proceedings initiated against families with no evidence and without allowing families the due process of an inquiry
- a campaign against private schools that are set up to cater to the needs of homeschooling families
- the encouragement of harassment of families by other agencies (e.g. homeschooling families who receive family benefits from social service agencies are being reported as "truant," causing some families interruptions in benefits payments).

OFTP, the homeschoolers' group, conducted interviews with families across the province for a year in preparation for the submission of the report. We have received hundreds of complaints about school board harassment over the years, with the problem getting progressively worse over the past two or three years. We provided written documentation of this harassment to the Ministry on numerous occasions. In a last bid to resolve the problem before initiating legal action against the Ministry, we contacted the provincial ombudsman. To go the extra mile, we met with the Provincial School Attendance Counselor and two other Ministry officials immediately after filing the report, to inform them that the complaint had been submitted and to attempt to keep the lines of communication open.

The Ontario *Education Act* excuses children from attendance at public schools if they are receiving "satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere." Nowhere does it state that the Ministry or its designates, the school boards, are the arbiters of whether the home instruction is in fact satisfactory. To the contrary, the Act states that, in the event of a dispute between a parent and an attendance counselor as to whether or not a child is excused from school attendance, the attendance counselor can call an "inquiry," which must be conducted by someone who is not an employee of the local school board.

One would think that the attendance counselor would need some reason to believe that a child was not receiving satisfactory instruction. Not so! The counselor need provide absolutely no reason for calling an inquiry.

Education officials attempt to liken their position to that of child welfare authorities. They hotly insist that they are only acting in the best interests of the children, protecting them from educational neglect or even possible abuse. OFTP points out that school boards are not child protection agencies and were never meant to be. The *Education Act* specifically states that attendance counselors may not enter a home without a parent's permission. If education officials have any reason to believe children are being abused, they, like every other citizen, have a duty to report their suspicions to a child welfare agency. At least one Children's Aid Society in Ontario has confirmed to a homeschooling legal advocate that homeschooling is not a child welfare issue. Regardless of all this, attendance counselors still tell parents that they are "required by law" to let them into their homes.

OFTP maintains that it is control, and not concern for the welfare of children, that is what most disputes between school officials and parents are really about. Homeschooling has grown steadily over the past 20 years in Ontario, but people looking for information about homeschooling who call the Ministry are routinely told that it is illegal. The recent increase in the bureaucratic campaign against homeschooling has created considerable suffering and hardship for many families, and the school boards' targets do not seem to be picked at random. Single mothers with disabled children have borne the brunt of some of the most outrageous attacks. Judy Gould, of Windsor, for example, found her disabled daughter ordered back to school by the attendance counselor even though the Ministry official in charge of her case refused to look at the evidence she had brought with her to her inquiry (several boxes of her daughter's work). This official also objected to the fact that Mrs. Gould had brought a lawyer with her to her inquiry. In addition, Mrs. Gould temporarily lost benefits to which her family was entitled because the school board reported her daughter truant to a social services agency. Mrs. Gould has ignored the Attendance Counselor's order, and her daughter has not returned to school. The school board has not pursued the matter further, even though the family is flouting the order. OFTP believes that the school board has not pursued Mrs. Gould further because the Ministry does not believe it would win a judgment against her. The Ministry appears to be fishing for a family it can pursue through the courts until it gets a judgment resulting in a precedent that will justify the boards' interference in

families' lives. Interestingly, none of the other families forced to go through an inquiry in recent years has thus far had their children ordered back to school.

Only two Canadian provinces have legislation that recognizes the parent, and not the state, as the primary educator of the child: British Columbia (where I now live) and Ontario. Ontario, with more than 30% of Canada's population, will set the tone for future changes in legislation across the country. If homeschoolers win their case in Ontario, force the Ministry to eliminate its restrictive "unofficial" policy memo, and prevent restrictive legislation from being tabled and passed, then there is hope that other provinces will follow suit. If the homeschoolers in Ontario lose, then we will likely see more and more intrusion into families' lives, as is currently the case in Alberta, Quebec, and Newfoundland, particularly.

Update from Japan

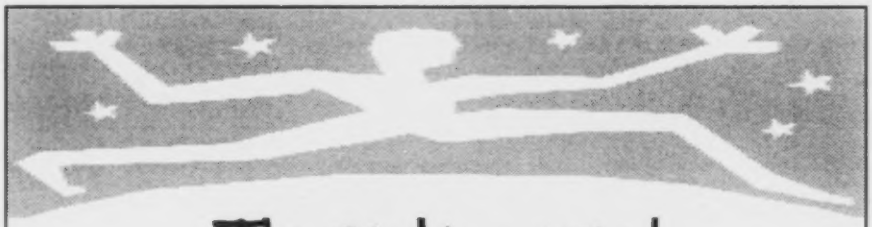
[SS:] In GWS #119, Kyoko Aizawa wrote that the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Japan had tried to amend the welfare law so that children who do not go to school could be put into juvenile reformatories. Kyoko and others testified about alternative education, and the members of the legislature ended up adopting a resolution saying that children can't be sent to reformatives solely because of non-attendance in school. Since then, there has apparently been some media interest in educational alternatives in Japan. In early January I was interviewed about homeschooling by Wataru Sawamura, a staff writer for the Japanese publication *Asahi Shimbun*. Recently, Kyoko sent us an article that appeared in the January 4, 1998 edition of *Japan Times*, an English-language newspaper, by Mick Corliss. Titled "Can truants, dropouts find an alternate route to education?", the article reads, in part:

... The number of children who say they hate school has been increasing. Though a minority, truants are steadily growing, their number tracing a gradual upward trajectory since 1974.

More than 77,000 students missed more than 50 days of school in 1996 for the expressed reason that they "hate school," compared with a little more than 17,000 in 1980. Students absent for more than 30 days in 1996 for the same reason reached almost 95,000, an increase of more than 15 percent from 1995. But these are only the official numbers. When those who missed more than 30 days for other reasons, such as illness, are included, the total exceeds 180,000. About one in every 50 high school students drops out every year.

These increases have resulted in a corresponding ease in the stigma associated with prolonged absence. It used to be that students who stayed away from school were viewed as delinquents and were called "school refusers." But now society isn't as quick to regard them as problem youth and has switched to a less caustic label – "nonattendance" students.

.. In light of the rise in absent students, the government eased its position in 1992 ... It also established



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facilities to counsel, instruct, and boost the academic abilities of traunts to enable them to rejoin their peers. ... If a student's principal acknowledges it to be in the best interests of the child, attendance at alternative institutions can be recognized as credit toward a diploma, as long as it is deemed to be helping the student return to the mainstream education system.

... Aside from whiling away the time at home, free schools are the most obvious choice for school refusers. They are generally attended at the child's free will and, accordingly, activities and curriculum are planned around the children's desires. Like most free schools, [Tokyo Shure] grew out of Keiko Okuchi's experience as a mother of children who refused to go to school and as a teacher who saw the system from the inside.

"At Shure, we offer children a chance to find themselves, pursuing their interests in a relaxed space," she says.

Affiliated with Tokyo Shure is Home Shure. Established four years ago, the center caters to school refusers and their parents. ... Initially involving 22 families, the center now has more than 400 using it as a haven for play, study, and information exchange, [the center's Noriko Hanai] says. "We are working to make it so that not going to school will not only be viewed less as a minus, but rather as a plus, a means to do more things," Hanai says.

... The number of dropouts looking to pursue education on their own has been reflected in the growth of "support" schools. Based mainly in the Tokyo area, support schools have ballooned from about five a half-decade ago to more than 30 now, and they are increasing steadily. ... Catering to roughly 5,000 students, support schools offer guidance on correspondence courses.

... Unlike many other countries, Japan does not recognize the right of parents to educate their children, and parents are expected to send children to school. ... According to experts, parents who practice homeschooling could be considered violators of the School Education Law and subject to fines. Possibly for this reason, homeschooling, in the sense of education administered by parents, has never caught on in Japan, they say.

"The law says we have the right to education but we don't have any right to choose the form of the education," says Otherwise Japan's Aizawa, who advocates the right of individuals to pursue education as they see fit. Education has been the realm of the state, Aizawa says, and parents do not realize they have a choice. A small movement is working to rectify this. ...

Office News

[SS:] We're excited about our 1998 conference, to be held at a family camp in Great Barrington, Mass. (in the Berkshires) on the weekend of Sept. 25-27th. This issue's back cover has further information, and we'll be keeping you posted in the coming months.

Inquiries and publicity have been coming from some interesting sources lately. We've talked to writers from *Woman's Day*, *Seventeen* magazine, and an assistant to William Safire (who writes the "On Language" column in *The New York Times magazine*) called to ask when homeschooling began to be written as one word rather than two. (It was nice to discover that someone else finds this topic as fascinating as we in the homeschooling community have always found it!) The *Seventeen* piece is only in the beginning stages, but the writer says that the magazine told her its teenage readers are interested in hearing more about homeschooling, which seems noteworthy in itself. The *Woman's Day* piece is tentatively scheduled for their September issue, and it will focus on what *others* can learn from homeschoolers, a topic I've often wished a magazine or newspaper writer would choose.

Isabel Lyman, who some time ago asked GWS readers to send her newspaper articles about homeschooling, has written a Policy Analysis paper for the Cato Institute that focuses on homeschooling. The 20-page booklet answers basic questions about homeschooling, drawing upon several recent articles, books, and research studies. If you're interested in seeing the report, you can order it for $6 from the Cato Institute, 1000 Mass. Ave. NW, Washington DC 20001. Ask for policy analysis no. 294.

Over the years, we have been able to use our gift subscription fund to cover the cost of a subscription for people who can't afford one on their own. Money for this fund comes *solely* from other readers' generosity, and since the fund is now running quite low, we need to appeal to you again. If you can donate the entire cost of a year's subscription ($25), that's wonderful; if you can only add a few extra dollars on to your renewal or book order, that helps too, because several small donations will add up to a subscription for a family in need. Just be sure to indicate that the extra money is for the gift sub fund. Thanks on behalf of the families who will benefit from your generosity.

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Calendar

May 1-2: Wisconsin Parents Assoc. 15th annual Home Education Conference at the University Center in **Stevens Pt, WI.** For info: Melissa Rice, 715-341-6378 or WPA, 608-283-3131 or write WPA, PO Box 2502, Madison WI 53701-2502.

May 9: "Happily Homeschooling Older Kids" at Great Books in **Lakewood, CO**. Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Cindy Stanley, 303-341-2242.

May 9-10: Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children conference at MIT in **Cambridge, MA.** Stephanie Tolan and others speaking. For info: Meg Swoboda, 207-767-6121, mpgtv@ime.net

May 21-22: Florida Parent-Educators Assoc at the Hyatt Hotel, **Orlando, FL**. Pat Farenga speaking. For info: Dave Exley, 407-722-0895.

May 22-25: Rethinking Education conferece in **Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX**. Cafi Cohen speaking; Holt Associates book table. For info: Sarah Jordan, 817-430-4835.

May 23: "Parents as Teachers at Home" Home School Book Fair in **Nags Head, NC**. For info: Kathleen Crawford, PATH, Rt 1 Box 165, Powells Pt NC 27966; 919-491-2313; crawfordcampus@coastalnet.com

May 30-31: Clonlara Home Based Education Program in **Toledo, OH**. Pat Montgomery, John Gatto, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: 415-769-4515 or carmen9@idt.net

June 6: Lane Inter-Christian Guild of Home Teachers 9th Annual Education Exposition at the Lane County Fairgrounds, **Eugene, OR**. Curriculum suppliers, workshops, kids' activities. For info: Beth at 541-935-7231, emmerts5@juno.com

June 12-14: The Link Homeschooling Conference in **Southern CA**. Cafi Cohen, Pat Farenga speaking. For info: Mary Leppert, 805-492-1373.

July 10-12: Homeschool and Family Learning Conference in **Boxborough, MA**. Workshops and exhibits. For info: 207-657-2800; royala@mindspring.com

Aug. 7-8: Homeschool and Family Learning Conference in **Livonia, MI**. For info: see above.

Aug. 15: Homeschooling for Everyone, by the Rocky Mtn Education Connection, at Teikyo Loretto Hts University in **Denver, CO**. David & Micki Colfax, Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Cindy Stanley, 303-341-2242.

Aug. 21-23: Home=Education Conference in **Sacramento, CA**. Victoria Moran, Ed Dickerson, Mary Griffith, Donna Nichols-White speaking. For info: 760-248-7631.

Sept. 25-27: Growing Without Schooling annual conference in **Great Barrington, MA**. For details, see the back cover of this issue of GWS, or call us at 617-864-3100. ◆

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Making Music
in the Community

Forming Celtic Singing Group

Shaidri Alrich (CA) writes:

Music has always been an important part of my life. I have been singing for longer than I can remember, but even before I could sing a note I was surrounded by music. My dad, Hank, sings and plays the guitar, bass, mandolin, and a number of other instruments. I started playing the violin when I was 3 and my mom, Lanis, drove me and my older sister Mylie to lessons almost every two weeks for the next ten years. Throughout most of that time it was a two-hour drive. For the first couple of years I studied classical music using the Suzuki method, and then when I was 6 I began learning old-time fiddle tunes. I have continued to study both classical and fiddle music and while classical has provided a good technical base, fiddle music has provided all the fun.

I have been homeschooled all my life, and, growing up in a small town, opportunities for playing music were limited. However, Mylie and I played fiddle tunes, accompanied by Hank on the guitar, at several local talent shows, and over the years we were asked to play at a variety of other events, including the elementary school's Pioneer Day where we played fiddle tunes while a whole class of third graders learned to dance the Virginia reel.

I had my first experience singing back-up vocals when I was 11 and Hank put together a band to play a benefit concert for the family of a man who had died in a trucking accident. The band was huge, consisting of drums, bass, three guitars, fiddle, harmonica, keyboards, and cello, plus Mylie, me, and a friend singing back-up vocals. Hank sang most of the lead vocals but a local blues and rock singer named Susie Wilson also sang a couple of numbers. The whole experience of being in that band was a lot of fun but although I didn't realize it at the time, the best thing I got out of it was getting to know Susie, as I would end up singing with her more in the future.

The only time I got involved in the local school's music program, I found it to be quite a depressing experience. I was 12 and joined a special choir that only met once a week. I joined thinking it would be fun and that I might even learn something. Well, I did. I learned that I was the only one there who had any intention of singing and that everyone else just wanted to get out of their other classes. After a while I got tired of spending our whole rehearsal listening to the kids messing around and the director telling them to be quiet, and I quit.

Shortly after that I began singing with Susie again, this time in a completely different context. She was hosting a weekly gathering of people who got together to play and sing Celtic music, and Mylie and I started going to sing with them. It was very informal and we usually started the evening with a potluck dinner and then sang, talked, and laughed for hours. After a while, those of us who sang together regularly formed a group called Ronnach and started performing together locally. My father is also a recording engineer and music producer, and he offered to help us make a tape. We talked about it for a while and all agreed that we would like to make a tape, so we began the process of rehearsing and recording. When we started recording there were six of us, but the band immediately started shrinking as several people found that they couldn't make that big a commitment. Soon Susie, Mary Batson, and I were the only ones left. By that time we were feeling pretty fragmented, so we decided to record enough for a demo tape and then concentrate on performing for a while to help us regain our focus. We sing mostly a capella traditional Celtic music but recently we have been adding more instrumentation. We have just finished our demo tape and have several performances scheduled for this spring, including a couple of school assemblies, where in addition to singing we will be wearing medieval garb and talking about the history surrounding the songs.

In addition to singing with Ronnach I spend a lot of time singing by myself, as I always have. Although I no longer take violin lessons, I still play regularly, and my most recent interest is Scottish fiddling. I am also learning guitar so that I will be able to accompany myself singing, as I am definitely not coordinated enough to sing and play the violin at the same time.

I am now 17 and people are always asking me what I plan to do when I grow up. Well, the truth is I don't exactly have a plan at the moment; all I can say is that I hope music will always be a part of my life.

Group Sings for Elders at Valentine's Tea

Patsy Mollica of Massachusetts writes:

Each week, fifteen homeschooled children attend my singing school. The youngest child is 3; the oldest is 16. Well, the youngest child is really just over a year; Felicity Bell participates with voice and movement as she sits with Sue, her mom.

The wide range of ages works beautifully. The oldest kids often lead groups of three or four in round singing. Recently we've done a four-part round, the fourth part being led by a group of the younger children. They are so proud to lead it themselves.

Behind this group of young musicians are some active and supportive moms. Sue Bell and I were talking one day about how nice it would be to have the homeschooled children and moms do something to help the community. Our Valentine Tea idea was born.

Our music room is a classroom in a former school that is now serving as a community center. It houses artists and historians. Here are yoga classes for every age, dog obedience classes, the senior citizen center, a coffee-

house run by teenagers, lunches for the elders with a vegetarian chef, etc. As you can see, all we had to do was open our door and our Valentine Tea party would be filled.

The homeschoolers decided to invite the elders in our town. We walked through the building to the office of the Council on Aging and left a note about the idea taped to the door. The response was enthusiastic, and soon we had 22 people to prepare for.

The brainstorming sessions with the children were so much fun. Anastasia said there had to be heart cookies, and Lucas said the frosting had to be pink. We then chose the singing program and decided who would stand where. The moms and their children would make fancy tea sandwiches, and at everyone's place would be a gift and a valentine. Over the next five weeks of rehearsing we decorated the room. The huge old wallpaper books came in handy for cutting out hundreds of hearts to be hung and given out as gifts. My daughter (Johannah, 16) cut down a sapling from our woods. It stood from floor to the high classroom ceiling and was covered with all different kinds of hearts. Elizabeth, Amy, and Anastasia made lovely paper chains to hang on it.

All during this time, we also decorated a Valentine Box. Rachael brought valentines for every child to place inside. Shayna, Chris, and Nina decorated cardboard boxes to be used for serving trays. Hunter and Raven would help their sister Shayna serve the valentine candies to each table of four people.

Finally the day came. Before the guests arrived, the children placed valentines on each chair and scurried around to sign each one and then placed them on the tables. One of the joys was seeing how much our new friends got a kick out of seeing each child's special signature. It was also fun to see the kids run from chair to chair being careful not to upset the table arrangements and the porcelain tea cups as they signed the cards.

As each guest arrived, Katie and Becky organized the taking of coats. I heard that one child, Hunter, was so eager to get a coat that a guest was met halfway up the stairs with a "May I take your coat?" The answer was, "Just as soon as I get in, dear." It seemed that our dreams of doing something good for others were coming true.

(l-r) Katie Calvert, Becky Bell, Rachel Ramey, and Johannah Mollica sing for guests at the Valentine's Tea

After our guests were seated and served homemade punch, we opened our program with the elders actually singing to us. The kids joined in, excitedly singing "You Are My Sunshine." We split the verses; sometimes the kids sang, sometimes the guests. It was an amazing blend. Next the children sang their rounds and little love songs. We ended with our special "Lights in Common" that we had sung before the whole town at Christmastime, by candlelight, in the church on our town common. "We are lights in common, coming here we meet, bringing joy this season, bringing gifts of peace." All in attendance will remember 4-year-old Lucas beginning this song with his sweet little voice.

After much applause and grand bows, it was on to sharing the food and the laughter. It was interesting to see the people linger at the tables for over two hours, conversing among themselves and sharing moments with the children. Suddenly it was over, with a great flurry to find out whose coat belonged to whom.

Writing about this has helped bring back the memories of a lovely day. I recall our tea time, when young people were served by serving. Maybe in the quiet of their homes later on, each child talked about the magic of sharing and each guest pondered the love and caring given to them. As the words of the song that finished our concert, so ended our day together: "So in this place, this moment; Together as moon and sun. Separate lives in common. Join in peace as one."

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Challenges & Concerns

Talking About Homeschooling

In GWS #120, a reader asked for suggestions about how young children should answer questions like "How's school going?" from friends and acquaintances. Here, readers reply:

From Alexandra Goncarovs of New York:

I frequently get asked, "How old are you? What grade are you in? What school do you go to?" When I tell people I am homeschooled, a blank look comes over the questioner's face, then recognition.

"Oh, how wonderful! Do you like it?" people usually say.

As I get older (I'm 12 now), people with older children in school, and young homeschooling parents, ask, "Do you want to go to school?" Absolutely not, I answer. I love homeschooling – except for those moments of hating math and just wanting more time to lie around sleeping, reading, or sewing.

"But you don't get enough social time. Don't you miss being with friends?" people often question. No problem for me. I work with four friends at Loaves and Fishes, a soup kitchen. I take a piano group class with three friends, usher at plays with a friend, enjoy seeing theater with my grandma, mom, and two friends since we all bought theater subscriptions together. I work on a newspaper I edit with four friends. And then there is our weekly ice skating with other homeschoolers, and contra dances, and choir. These are just some of the things I do with my friends or where I meet new friends. Through my activities, I have met people of all ages who have become good friends. I also have some 20 pen-friends and enjoy them all.

One of my mother's friends, thinking I only know people my parents know, assumed my parents must pick my friends for me, and voiced this as a reason not to homeschool, especially if you're an older kid. Not true! Actually, my parents have met some of *their* best friends because of activities or people my sister, brother, and I were interested in. A couple of years ago, my brother, then 3, really liked a girl in his theater class. My mom called the mother and set up a playtime for the children. I babysat for them a couple of times and the parents and kids are now quite good friends.

So when people ask what school I go to, I say very calmly, with pride, "I am homeschooled!"

"Do you ever want to go to high school?" people query, sure there must be some secret, unfulfilled desire to be in school that I'm denying myself or being denied.

"No, the only time I will ever go to school, unless something big changes in my family, is college," I answer. I love sharing with other people why I love homeschooling and my life. It is being an activist for my cause. Those sticky conversations, the ones where people don't agree with me, I actually find empowering. I can walk away feeling free – that I'm in charge of my education and my life.

From Suzanne Garitty of Oregon:

My son Owen, age 7, also didn't know what to say to the question "How's school?" when he was younger. Now he responds simply and directly: "Good." Then, as he says, "they usually ask me more questions and then I say I'm homeschooled."

From Kelly Dammucci of California:

I am 8. My father is a veterinarian and sometimes I go to work with him. I help by being a receptionist. When clients see me, they look at me sort of strange and say, "Why aren't you in school today?" I simply say, "I am a homeschooler," even though I am really an unschooler. If I said, "I am an unschooler," they would probably ask me for a description, like, "What the heck is an unschooler?"

So that's how I deal with people asking me "Why aren't you in school today?" or "What school do you go to?" or "How is school?"

From Rebecca Auerbach of California:

I was often asked "How is school going?" when I was little, both by adults who knew I was homeschooled and by ones who did not. Coming from acquaintances who knew of my homeschooling, the question became a nuisance after a while. It was no trouble in my first years of homeschool: I had been to kindergarten and was still doing a bit of formal schoolwork, so I could answer in much the same way that a school kid would. But my family soon forgot structured lessons. How was I to discuss how school was going when I could not distinguish "school" from the rest of my life?

Since some California homeschoolers had been hassled by authorities, my parents told me not to explain the extent of our lack of structure. So, hearing "How is school going?", I would quickly rack my brains to remember some school-ish thing I had read about lately and announce it in formal terms. "Oh, just fine; I've been studying the Civil War." There, I had proved I was Getting an Education.

When people who did not know I was homeschooled would ask how school was going, I was delighted. Here was my chance to say, "I don't go to school!" And then would come the follow-up questions. Did I like homeschooling? Was it legal? Did I have to take tests? My parents, concerned that these barrages of questions would bother me, let me know that it was all right to change the subject, that I didn't have to talk about homeschooling if I didn't feel like it. If I didn't feel like it? That day would never come.

I knew that most adults who asked me questions were only making conversation with a cute little girl, and sometimes I wished for something more. That is why I came to recognize "How is school going" as a wonderful opportunity. Mention homeschooling, and that air of just making conversation would vanish. The adults would hang on my every word. They would think about what I told them. These homeschooling conversations were a wonderful thing: a time when adults asked questions of a little girl and truly cared about the answers.

Unhappy About Her Reading Ability

Debbie Westheimer (OH) writes:

Finally I am taking the time to respond to Leslie Beckett's letter, "Trying Not to Worry about Reading," in GWS #119. We too have a daughter who is reading on the later side, and we did choose to visit a vision/developmental therapist. One of the reasons we were inspired to seek assistance was that our daughter Hannah, unlike Leslie's daughter Carmen, was not satisfied with waiting to read fluently. She was unhappy about her reading skills and felt bad about herself as she naturally compared her experience to peers and older siblings.

In the summer of 1996, I went to a homeschooling conference put on by the Clonlara Home Based Education Program and attended a session titled "Late Readers' Self-Esteem." While there was a young man there who didn't read until he was about 10 or 11, he differed from Hannah in that he didn't remember caring about this. Hannah cares a lot. She and I could not relate to the "Late Readers Turn Out OK" Focus in GWS #115 because both of the grown homeschoolers interviewed there described the ways they got around not reading and articulated a confidence Hannah lacks. I realize that their perspective is hindsight and that it could be that their feelings would be different if they had been interviewed during the waiting period, between wanting to read fluently and being able to. That is exactly where Hannah finds herself at 11 years three months.

The panel at the Clonlara session advised me simply to teach Hannah to read. If she wanted to do it, then it was my responsibility to break the code for her and lead her to the satisfaction of absorbing words. I wasn't convinced it was all that easy. If Hannah wanted to read, it seemed to me that she would if she could. More important, I was sure she would when she was ready. I didn't understand and still don't understand what needs to happen for Hannah in order for everything to work for her so that she is able to do as she wants. I do know one thing, that it has to do with time and experience.

I gave Hannah two ideas about working or waiting for reading to come her way. One was that I was happy to listen to her read and would of course help her when she needed help. Or we would not practice reading and would just be patient. Either way, I would continue our morning and evening reading aloud of chapter books. She was not happy either working on reading *or* waiting, so I have had to work on being patient and accepting her profound frustration and disappointment. Hannah is sad. I need to allow her this.

In the fall of 1996, Hannah was evaluated by Dr. Horn in Dayton, Ohio. He suggested that Hannah was having difficulty because of tracking and directionality delays. For four months, we did daily exercises that were to strengthen her eyes. She graduated past each exercise but never recognized personal progress. I have kept tapes of her progress reading out loud and even after listening to the tapes, she does not feel accomplished. I am sure that is because she has her own specifications. She wants to master the word so that she can pick up a book intended for her age group and read it fluently on her own. It's true; she is not yet doing that. She can read to her younger siblings, but that is not a measure to be proud of, in her eyes.

Here is what I think and here is what I wonder: I think that the experience with Dr. Horn gave us no gain. Any advancement her brain and eye muscles accomplished was canceled out by her low self-esteem. The whole process, from the evaluation to doing the exercises, only furthered her

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already low image of herself in this regard. I wonder if parents can do anything else but sympathize without demoralizing, understand and, most important, express confidence that reading will come just like other skills and growths in the process of getting older. What I have learned is that helping can be a tricky business.

Ordinary Kids, Not Superstars

Sherry Boas (FL) writes:

Our kids are great people who make us exceptionally proud. They have many talents and interests and we have all, through homeschooling, been able to get to know each other more intimately than would ever have been possible had we gone the traditional school route. But they aren't superstars; these are three ordinary kids living not-so-ordinary lives in a rural setting with plenty of chores to do while juggling their schoolwork with personal interests. They feel, much as we parents do, that there is just not enough time in each day to do all we want to do.

Maybe where we live has limited their potential to pursue more activities outside of the home. Because we are an hour away from a city and not in walking or bicycling distance from any smaller town, all transporting must be done by mom or dad and that is difficult if not sometimes impossible to do while also running a couple of businesses, taking care of our property, and just being a parent. But then again, if there was something the kids really wanted to do, we would always find a way to fit it in. Through the pages of GWS we found out about the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Vermont and its camp for homeschoolers, and two of our kids have reaped immeasurable benefits from that experience, including the many friendships it has spawned. They travel together, several times a year, the 1500 miles to and from New England to visit friends and attend camp.

The internet has become for them what the telephone was for me when I was growing up – a link between the distance from my house to the homes of my friends. But it is also more than that. It has become an instant pathway to almost any topic.

Our two oldest kids have taken community college courses as dual enrollment students. They all have taken sign language classes for credit through a local high school, participated and won awards in local art shows, helped with our family business, and learned so much about real life by helping care for their younger brother (who the three oldest kids actually delivered, but that is another story). But these are not kids who have racked up an academic profile that would turn the head of an admissions officer. None of them like to do math. Only one loves to read. They know a little about a lot of things but not a lot about any one thing, not to the point of being master. Their talents are in things not usually ranked high by societal standards: juggling five balls, unicycle riding, gardening, recreational swimming, waterskiing, massage, cooking, origami, doing jigsaw puzzles, drawing, sculpting, piano playing, chess, etc. And yet it is accomplishments like these that help make them such interesting people.

I have no idea what is going to happen in the next few years. Will the kids go off to college as they expect to do? If so, where will they go? How hard or easy will it be for them to get in? Will it be an experience they will enjoy and be satisfied with? And what will they eventually do for work? Where will they wind up living and who will they be with? These are questions all parents, homeschooling or not, must ponder as they watch their kids grow up, but it seems that we who have taken a less traditional path might wonder more if we have done the best for our kids.

It would help me to hear more from those who are raising families without the benefit of a close-knit local support group or a nearby city or kids who have a single-minded determination to pursue a specific goal. There must be many others like me who need to be reassured that everything will work out fine even if your kids like to watch Seinfeld more than do algebra, want to go online more than go to the library, or want to take a walk more than join a soccer team.

Others Criticize No-College Choice

Ruth Matilsky (NJ) writes:

Everyone in our community seems to be deeply concerned about whether Sarabeth, my oldest, is going to college. What's particularly annoying is people's refusal to recognize that Going to College does not equal being educated. Or even going to high school. I was at a party recently where a woman said she felt three years of foreign language should be part of a high school curric-ulum. There were four of us sitting together at this point and I said, "Well, we're all high school graduates who took a language. How good was it for us?" Each of us recounted our years of language training and the fact that those years had not prepared us for foreign travel. Each of us said that when we spent time in a country we found it much easier to learn the language, but the classroom years just hadn't done the trick. And yet, the two women involved in the conversation insisted that three years of a language should be required. *Even though we had all told how useless it had been!* This was just contrary to what they had been programmed to believe. (The man in the group admitted that language classes hadn't done him any good.)

To tell the truth, I find this frightening. After years of forced memorization and regurgitation, people swallow the party line and can't process conflicting information. Yet why didn't this happen to me? Never for a moment did I doubt that my kids could learn outside of a school environment. Why did some of us escape the brainwashing?

Maybe I didn't completely escape it, though. There are times when someone, especially if it's someone in authority, will say something that makes absolutely no sense, something that I know isn't true, and if it's said authoritatively enough or assuredly enough, I will question myself or back down from my own beliefs. I'm working on this.

Anyway, people do seem very concerned about Sarabeth's choices these days. An acquaintance walked into our food co-op the other day, a perfectly nice, friendly person, and she looked me straight in the eye and said, "Well, Ruth, *is* Sarabeth going to college?" I swear, she said it just like that. As though I were on television and this was the $64,000 question. I guess even though the homeschooling movement is growing, there aren't all that many homeschooled teenagers around here and people have been curious for years about what is going to happen to Sara, our poor guinea pig. I will admit I wonder myself sometimes. So far Sara has done better than me at every stage of life. But some members of this family are not the greatest spellers in the world and I wonder what that will mean. What saves me here is that a friend from high school got a Ph.D. in business and makes pots of money and gets asked to speak all over the world and can't spell at all. As a grown man, he spelled goat "gote." And my husband Terry, who works at Rutgers University, tells me about well-paid faculty there who absolutely can't spell.

So there you are. But it's strange to face actual hostility from others about Sara's not wanting to go to college. When I told one woman that she was going with friends on a cycling trip through Europe next year, the woman said, "Well! Don't we *all* want to spend ten months in Europe!" I don't understand this hostility. Sara says it's because people have to face up to the fact that *they* would have liked to spend ten months in Europe and never did and here she is doing what she wants to do instead of what the usual prescription calls for. I guess that's it. ◆

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Parents and Grown Homeschoolers: Staying Connected

An Interdependent Relationship

From Loretta Heuer (MA):

When my two sons – Jed, now 15, and Tad, who just turned 20 – were little boys, they needed a homeschooling mom who was a soulmate and a playmate, someone who absolutely cherished them and who would get down on the ground to look at bugs, mess around with sloppy concoctions, and sing all the verses to "Sweet Betsy from Pike."

However, in pre-adolescence, they needed me to blend into the wallpaper, to be in the background rather than in the foreground. I would occupy the same space, but I'd be pursuing my own activities while they were engaged in theirs. We'd meet over lunch, talking about our morning, planning what we'd do together later in the day. It wasn't as easy as it sounds. Learning to respect an adolescent's need for distance was difficult for someone who had truly enjoyed being involved in the things her children loved. I needed to learn new, more passive ways of involvement. I could still be a soulmate, but I had to wait for their initiatives. Instead of a playful companion, they needed me to be a facilitator, a guide by their side who knew their learning style and interests, who could stretch their understanding by engaging them in a dialogue, and who could discover just the right book, article, video, course, concert, or exhibit at just the right time. I was cast in the role of reference librarian, always on the lookout for that one special resource they needed.

Now that both boys are young adults, they need me in another way. Yes, they still need someone who absolutely cherishes them, but this time they need me as an adult friend. They've gone from dependent child to independent adolescent to interdependent young adult.

How does this interdependent relationship play out day to day? Well, it may come as a phone call from Tad – who is at college about an hour away – asking about taking a course in mineralogy and crystallography. As a former geology major, I knew enough about the scope and content of the course to discuss it with him, and in doing so I renewed my own passion for a subject that I had long ago filed away. As a young adult, Tad has learned to trust his mother's expertise.

One way my husband and I parent our grown-up children is helping them see structures of adult life that have been heretofore invisible to them. How does one buy a car wisely? Or negotiate a lease on an apartment? We are there to share our experience whenever they ask. On other occasions Tad has needed us in more nitty-gritty ways: "We had a mix-up at the supermarket tonight," he says, "and bought beef cubes instead of ground beef. We have carrots, celery, potatoes, and onions, but none of us knows what to do. Do you have a recipe?" This amuses me, since it belies the myth that unschoolers learn all their math and chemistry at the stove.

When Tad was heading off to college two-and-a-half years ago, friends warned me that I'd miss him terribly, as they did their own sons and daughters. In fact, these friends prophesied, I'd miss him even more, because our bonds were so strong. Not so. The strong bonds made it easy to let go. We had had the luxury of time together during our homeschooling years. We had gone through our period of independence. Now it was time to move on, out and away.

Paradoxically, it's technology that helps keep the bond strong now. Not only is email useful to helping solve practical problems like how to make beef stew, but it also lets us engage in dialogue about the intangible issues that concern young adults. When Tad's away at school there are often long IMs – interactive "instant messages" where we "talk" in real time by typing our thoughts on our separate computers which are linked through the internet. It's faster than letters, but slower and more reflective than a phone conversation.

Our family is still a work in progress. I'm still working on patience and silence. It is so easy to see things from the vantage point of age and experience and so tempting to offer my wise opinions, infallible advice, and comprehensive answers. I think the key to building an adult friendship with Tad and Jed has been treating them the same as I do my other adult friends. When my friends take me into their confidence, I need to know what they want from me. My opinion? Advice? A dispassionate critique of the situation? A compassionate, uncritical ear while they vent? We need to ask our children the same questions.

There are ages and stages ahead: careers, perhaps a new family, our own mid-life changes. We are confident, however, that the relationship forged during the homeschooling years will continue to bind us together in love as a family.

Staying Connected While at Home *Or* Far Away

From Deb Shell (VT):

At least several times each week I marvel at how we've maintained close relationships with our children even as they become more and more independent. The continuum of growth is quite apparent in our family, since my four children range in age from 13 through 21. This helps me to see how the process evolves through the teen years, lest I forget and become impatient when things don't go as smoothly as I might prefer!

I have two "launched" daughters

now – Mae (21) and Sara (18) – and one balancing on the edge of our nest. Emily, at 16, plans to go away to college in the fall. She looks ahead to opportunities that will become available to her and to future friendships. I can see how capable she is now, and how ready she'll be to take on the challenges she seeks. I do feel some sadness at times, knowing these easy times together will become rarer, but I'm also fairly well prepared because, like the others, she's been preparing me for her leaving for a few years now. And although I may not see the older girls as often, we maintain a comfortable, easy, loving relationship even when apart.

Gradually, throughout the teen years, my daughters have become focused on out-of-home-activities, yet never to the exclusion of home. Matters that didn't used to be as negotiable, such as going to outside activities during the once-sacred dinner hour, became more common. They developed relationships with mentors that lessened family time together. They planned activities with each other, or with friends, that didn't include parents. They took classes, selected art, music and dance programs, attended workshops, seminars, and concerts independently, and I see now that what these opportunities provided was experience in the wider world on their own terms, fully responsible for themselves. The home fires will always burn; they will always be welcome to engage with us as much as they want. Happily for me, they continue to find ways to stay connected to me and their father and to each other.

Mae lives at home, upstairs in what she fondly calls her apartment. Over the years, the more independent she became, the more she recognized her need to contribute to her "keep," as she calls it. I remember being surprised when at 18 she announced that now she needed additional household jobs. About a year ago she took over all the grocery shopping and bakes bread once a week. Now that she has several outside jobs, which include working at the library, making web-pages, teaching computer at the local elementary school, baby-sitting, as well as volunteering (she's the youngest library trustee), we actually have to make time to see each other. We try to get our hair cut together and usually combine that with shopping at a favorite used clothing store. Mae shares essays with me and posts new poems she's written on the refrigerator for us all to read. She has found special ways to stay connected even though she's on her own every day.

Sara chose to go to a faraway college and has been coming and going for the past 1 1/2 years. At barely 17 she left for NYU in New York City and then just recently transferred to Smith College in Massachusetts. Her leaving for college was hard because we couldn't see each other as often, or as easily, as any of us liked. We discovered pretty quickly that she needed to come home more often than she had expected to, and we just accommodated, seeing the travel expense as part of the cost of her going to NYU. As she made more connections in the city and developed friendships, her need to come home lessened and she came less often. Surprisingly for me, we actually added another dimension to our relationship at this point since we made time to write to each other. I should say, Sara wrote the most, and shared her goings on, feelings, so much of her experience, through emails. I think Sara and I, as well as the rest of the family, gained new perspectives on each other from being apart, which served to make us want to be together even more.

While at college, Sara continued to ask me for suggestions about her papers and assignments, which I've always loved to be invited to do, even when she was home more of the time. This year is different – Sara is more independent in many ways. I had been quite involved in helping her with the process of applying to NYU, but when she decided to transfer to Smith, she did it entirely on her own. She visited the campus, assessed the surrounding towns, had an interview, had transcripts sent, etc., dealing with all the bureaucracy and uncertainty of her future without losing sight of her goals. I see that Sara can navigate wherever she is, so I've stopped worrying about all those details that used to make me stressed. I also know that I can more easily let go of my mother worries since she stays in close touch

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even when she isn't physically close.

Meanwhile, Eva, at 13, is realistic about going away for five weeks to a dance program this summer. She asked me if I thought she might be too homesick. She's thinking about this experience not only in terms of what skills she hopes to gain but also about her emotional needs. I think this is so healthy, and I worry less than I did years ago because I can see that, like her sisters, our youngest will take care of herself as she makes her life choices.

Transition Was Gradual

From Alison McKee (WI):

Our son Christian's transition to college life has been relatively easy for us and, I believe, relatively easy for him. I think this is so because this transition, in many ways, has been in the making for years. For quite a while, many of Christian's friends have been in college and were interested in books and in discussing ideas, as Christian is. And even before leaving for college, Christian had a history of leaving home for lengthy periods to study things that interested him (fly fishing and German in particular). As my husband David and I witnessed these developments, we realized that Christian was slowly making the transition from living at home to finding his own way in the world. We just weren't sure where he'd end up: by a stream or in a lecture hall. By the time he announced that he'd prefer a lecture hall, David and I had already been through much of the transitional angst that many parents experience when their kids first move out. I'm not saying that Christian's transition to living independently hasn't pulled at my heart strings; it has. But the transition has been gradual and has always felt so right.

When Christian left for college, he practically ran. He was eager to get on with his studies, live the campus life, and make new friends. In fact, he was so eager to go that both David and I were concerned that he might feel disappointed once class routines set in. We were concerned that he might miss many of the community activities of the "real world" that he'd been immersed in for so long. Much to our delight, this has not happened. He has found ways to pursue his interests in music (he's teaching himself to play the mandolin) and radio broadcasting, and he remains enthusiastic about being a student, even when the professors are not always the best.

I can't say that much has changed in David's and my relationship with Christian, except that he is a day's train, bus, or car trip away. Our communications with one another are via email, U.S. mail, and infrequent phone calls. We offer our help and consolation when things get rough, but generally speaking, we are not part of the life he is creating for himself unless he invites us to be. This may sound harsh, yet David and I feel it is simply another indication that Christian's lifelong homeschooling experience has given him the wings he needs. In David's words, "Christian will always have a mother and father, but he no longer needs us to be his parents."

This is not an idea that has come to us suddenly; rather, it has come over the course of these past few transitional years. Now that Christian is no longer living at home, it is simply easier to understand the role shift. He has weathered significant difficulties with roommates, professors, and other students. When he feels the need, he calls or emails us. With the exception of one call, these are not calls of "Help me, I don't know what to do," but rather, "Listen, see what you think, this is what I'm doing." As he processes his solutions to the problems he faces, it is quite apparent that he has had almost no need for us to help him find his way through the maze of traditional college routines. His first quarter successes affirm for us that he knows how to pace himself, who to turn to when the going gets tough, and how to continue finding enjoyment in his work.

Of course, life here at home has changed. The first week of Christian's absence was the most difficult. It wasn't like his past leavetakings, where I'd catch myself thinking that Christian would be home in a few hours or that he must be sleeping in. It was deeper than that. This departure had a sense of being more final. Although Christian would be home for holidays and possibly over the summer, his returns to us would be different, temporary. The realization of this fact remains bittersweet, and yet I'd never want him to give up what he has found for himself at college. At the moment, things are right the way they are and I

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enjoy being able to surprise him by sending him a batch of his favorite "oatmeal scotchies" from time to time.

It's funny, but when I think of Christian I think of him as a homeschooler (still) who is continuing his homeschooling experience elsewhere.

Conversing as Equals

From Peter Bergson (PA):

When I was young, I felt as if I lived in my world and my parents lived in theirs. I expected to be totally independent and separate from my parents when I grew up because in many ways I felt that way already, at least emotionally. I wanted to have a closer relationship with my own children, which I've had, and I wanted that close relationship to continue when they grew up, which has also happened.

I think I've done a lot to *make* that wish come true, even though I suspect my children would be surprised by that comment. The main thing I've done is simply to try to stay engaged with their lives. When I went to college, I don't think my parents ever asked me about my courses, or, if they did, it was to ask what grades I was getting. I express interest in my children's courses and activities, and I try to do it in a way that shows genuine interest rather than the sense that I'm checking up or judging. The biggest surprise for me of having grown children – maybe unexpected delight would be more accurate – has been the discovery that we can converse as true intellectual equals. When Amanda, my eldest (now 21), first started taking class at the University of Pennsylvania several years ago, she would take the train into the city in the afternoon, and I would then drive in to pick her up at night. During the car rides home, we began a tradition of having some of the most wonderful, mutually enlightening and satisfying conversations that I could imagine. We've always had many family discussions, but now Amanda has so much content knowledge that I don't have, even in areas that I supposedly studied in college. She offers up so much new information to me (and the rest of the family) in so many areas – computers, history, the theater, current events, you name it.

I feel almost like a peer with Amanda not only intellectually but also often emotionally. Amanda sometimes comes to me for advice, but even then it's as another adult, not as a child. She gets my jokes, gives them right back to me, knows how to tease lovingly, feels free to correct me but does it far more maturely than I do her, usually.

Emily, now 19, lives away at college but usually spends weekends at home, so we're still in close touch. She uses me as a consultant when she wants my help and sometimes asks for favors which, of course, I love to do for her. I value her opinion and insights, though they often have as much passion as reason behind them – just as they have since she was 2. It's one of the things I love best about her.

With Emily living at college several days a week and running her own business, and with Amanda working full time during the day and attending college in the evenings, both are naturally away from home and involved in their own lives much more than when they were younger. Since they're now so much more independent, we often hear about their decisions after they've made them instead of being involved in the process, as we were years ago. And I know that they have the last word on their choices now, whereas when they were younger, I had more input or even, in some cases, ultimate control. A simple example is that whereas with their younger sister Julia, who is 16, we still have a say about whether a particular video she wants to watch is OK with us or is appropriate for her, with Amanda and Emily that's no longer the case.

As a related item, having college-age children out in the world so much and yet still involved in much of our daily life has had an impact on our two younger children as well. Amanda was the first to see that, had she gone away to school, she would have missed the transition of her brother, Nicholas, now age 13, from little boy to young man. So, the more the older children mature as their own people, the more they bring back to the family for the good of us all. ◆

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Older Kids Learning from Younger Ones

They Don't Even Know I'm Learning

From Julia Bergson-Shilcock (PA):

For the past six years, I have volunteered at the Pratt school in inner-city Philadelphia. I volunteer in the kindergarten classroom, and I learn so much from it. The kids often talk about things like guns and jail and drugs in almost a casual manner, and it totally puts things into perspective for me, and makes these things real instead of just something you hear on the news. When I hear these 5 or 6 year olds say, "My dad was busted," or "My uncle was killed," I realize that they're so used to these terrible things, while I'm ten years older and the same things strike me as so shocking. So I've learned about their lives and they don't even realize I'm learning from them. I'm sure if you asked them, "When this person comes to volunteer, are you teaching her or is she teaching you?" they would say, "She's teaching me." But one of the reasons I've stuck with this job for so long is that I can learn so much from the kids. Each year it's a new group of kids and each child has a different story.

I had another experience learning from someone younger this past summer, when I was involved with a program called Fresh Air Child. It's a program where children come from New York City to stay with families for two weeks. I was the one in my family who really wanted to do this, so although my parents and my sisters helped me, it was mainly my responsibility to take care of the 8-year-old girl who came to stay with us. What I learned from the whole experience is how hard it is to try and raise a happy, healthy child. We had some trying times, when she kind of tested her freedom and we struggled about things, but again, I learned a whole lot from her and she probably didn't even know I was learning.

Then, I have a friend who is two years younger than me. We're taking Latin together; her older brother, a college student, is teaching the two of us and one other friend. She had been taking Latin for several months before I started, and a lot of times I find myself going to her for help, because she's had the experience and because she's just been around Latin so much, from hearing her brother do his homework. Some people might find it hard to go to a friend for help, especially a younger friend, but I don't have a problem with it. Maybe if it were something that I felt I should already know and I had to go to a younger friend for help, then it would be a bit awkward. But since I've never taken Latin before, I don't expect myself to know it and I don't mind asking.

Finally, my brother Nicholas, who is 13, is into computers and computer programming. When it comes to computers, I know what I need to know to do the things I do – sign on to America Online or write a paper – but if there's ever a problem, I go to my older sister Amanda or, more likely, Nicholas. I don't ever feel stupid asking him for help; in fact, I get excited when he can help me because I think it's so cool that he's so smart in that area and can do what many adults get paid to do (or can't even figure out!).

In everyday life, there are so many instances of older people learning from younger ones. Just the other day, my dad was learning to play chess for the first time from an 8-year-old. It was so interesting for me to see, because I would have thought that my dad already knew how to play chess, but he had no problem going up to this boy and asking him to teach him. I think one of the best things about older people learning from younger kids is that, a lot of times, the younger kids feel quite privileged and honored that someone older is willing to ask them for help. They probably feel very smart and feel that they have a special gift when that happens, so they're glad to share it.

Brother Helps with Reading

From Eoin Gaj (MA):

I am an 11-year-old boy, and I have learned from my 6-year-old brother Daire in a couple of different ways. Daire and I are both learning how to read, and when I'm reading a book, for the most part I'm looking solely at the words. Daire, who is looking at the pictures and thinking more about the story itself, is often able to help me with a word that I am stuck on. For example, I was once trying to read a list of other books in the "Tom and Pippo" series. I read, "Tom and Pippo and the Washing Ma - ma - ma..." Then Daire said, "washing machine," which was the right word.

At first when Daire was starting to learn to read, I got more motivated to learn how to read because I didn't want

to have a brother who was five years younger than me who was able to read more than me. When Daire helped me with a word, at first I was embarrassed to have a younger brother helping me. Then I would assure myself that I still knew how to read more than Daire, which is true. Now when he helps me with a word, I just say thank you and go on with the book. Now that I'm reading more and more often, it seems more normal. I take it as Daire's helping me then, and I help him with a lot of other things too. Now I actually choose to go off with Daire and read just with him.

Another thing I've learned from Daire is some science, especially electricity. I've learned some basic circuitry and other things from listening to books being read to Daire and Daire discussing electricity and making lighthouses, flashlights, and electromagnets. I never felt embarrassed about not knowing as much about electricity as Daire because science doesn't mean as much to me as reading.

When listening to a science book, I used to feel that I had to understand everything before we could go on to the next page. Daire, though, will go for the overall picture, which makes it much easier to read through science books, and he'll pick up the smaller details later. I've tried Daire's way of learning and I've found that it does often make things easier.

Architecture, Art, Computers

From Caitlin Fahey (NM):

The people younger than me that I've learned from the most are my two sisters, but I've also learned from our neighbors, a brother and sister ages 11 and 14. The 14-year-old has completely taught himself architecture and how to draw floor plans to scale. Our family often visits his, and as we visit, I watch him draw floor plans or look through architectural magazines. I've picked up a lot just by watching, but sometimes I ask him direct questions. For example, once I tried to draw my own floor plan with him, and I asked him how to draw to scale, and how to draw a door and a window. So I have learned several things about homes from him, and I've also learned about Peru, where he was born. He even taught us to make fried bananas! And I have picked up a bit of Spanish from him. I took Spanish from his mother one summer, and sometimes I would sit with the kids and we would get out their family photo albums. I'd try to ask them questions about the pictures, in Spanish. His younger sister also has taught me how to make different types of beads out of polymer clay, and they both have introduced me to some new games.

As for my sisters, I have been learning from them since they were born. Ravenna, 13, is the most technically minded in the family, and I have many a time learned something about computers or electronics from her. She drops little tidbits of information as she talks about computers; for example, she'll say, "Our computer doesn't have enough RAM." I say, "What's RAM?" and she explains it to me. Lately, as Ravenna has become more interested in electronics, she's gotten kits that let you put things together, like a radio-building kit and a kit that has you build a little mechanical dinosaur. After she's finished, she'll take the completed project to me and explain to me how the various parts work. I haven't specifically asked her to teach me about this, but I guess she just saw that I was interested after she showed me the first time. Ravenna also cooks really well, and knows a lot about measuring and baking, so I've learned from her in that way too.

Elyse, 10, is incredibly artistic, blowing our minds with her visual and literary creations. She's absolutely crazy about art and comes up with two new projects every day. I don't do much art myself, but I like watching her. When it comes to writing, though, I do often get ideas from her. She's always coming up with things that she wants to write about – recently she showed me a report she had written about African elephants, all of a sudden – and once she made an alphabet book, which gave me the idea to make an alphabet book of my own. Elyse also takes jazz dance and ballet and she often teaches me the dance steps that she's learned.

Sometimes I look at both my sisters' work and say, "Why didn't I think of that?", because they can be so original. Every time I interact with them I have the opportunity to learn something new. I think that the idea of a teacher having to be someone older than you is too commonly accepted. Everyone, young or old, has something to share, and we should be happy to learn.

Nephew Teaches Her About Persistence

From Victoria Church (CT):

I have a 2-year-old nephew called Max, and he has taught me that it is OK to be happy all the time and not be miserable when you do something that doesn't work out. We have a toy castle that first belonged to my brother Nate (Max's father) and is now Max's. At the top of one of the castle towers there is a trap door like a laundry chute. Max tried to put everything in it: a superball, a Playmobil person, pieces of Flexi-blocks, and a nice big dump truck. The truck did not fit through and he was not happy about it. But immediately he tried again and again. Finally he got the idea that it just wouldn't work. So he put the truck down, picked up a little block and handed it to me, and I put it successfully through the chute. He stood straight up and clapped and laughed and said, "Yaaaay!" He is like a cheerleader – he got everyone else clapping, too.

This taught me that even if we try something that doesn't work, we can try a different way. When I have a math problem that is difficult for me, and I can't get it to work the way they explain it in my math book, I just sit and think for a minute or two, and usually I come up with a way it will work. If I don't, I can ask someone for help, just as Max asked me.

He also taught me that if I've been working at something very hard, something that seems impossible to me, and I finally get it, it is good to celebrate.

It didn't surprise me to learn from watching Max, because I have several younger friends who teach me things, and I know my parents learn from or with my sister and me all the time.

Learning to Interact with Babies

From Julian Church (CT):

Babies were always of average interest to me. For instance, if I saw a baby I would stroke its head and play with it a little, but I didn't actually look into its eyes and get involved with it. Then my nephew Max was born. The first minute I held him – he was less than two hours old – I looked into his eyes and immediately adored him. He became a real living person to me at that moment.

Ever since then, I have been drawn like a magnet to every baby I see. I pick up the baby and look into its eyes, and the same thing happens that happened with Max. I realize that this baby is a real individual, too.

As he has grown, I have learned to love Max even more. I've learned to meet his needs, changing his diaper when it's wet and feeding him when he's hungry. And I've learned to go to his level when he plays and not stay on mine. I get down on the floor and play "crash the cars" and then "fix the cars." When he dances wildly without shyness, I do it with him. He has helped me remember how to do what I did when I was little – to be so enthusiastic that I don't mind clapping, yelling "yaaaay," and jumping up and down when he does.

Max has taught me how to interact with younger children and how to love them. It felt so natural to learn from Max that I didn't even realize I was learning anything, until I stopped to think about it.

Now his infant sister Zoë will benefit from what I've learned.

Little Kids Teach Her About Art

From Siobhan Solberg of New York:

At first, when I was thinking about this question, I thought, "What could I learn from someone younger than myself? Don't you usually learn from your elders, hasn't that been the lifelong tradition?"

Then that night, when I couldn't fall asleep, I started to think about it: maybe I have learned from someone younger than myself. Of course, I don't have as large a choice of younger people as someone who was 40 years old would have, because I'm only 15. Well, that's when it suddenly occurred to me that I've probably learned things like patience, not being selfish or jealous, etc., from people younger than myself, if indirectly. For example, I babysit for a lot of younger homeschoolers, and sometimes they can be pretty wild, because they're only 4 or 5. I don't want to scream at them, so I'm learning to control myself, to be patient, and to act responsibly. The thing is, I took traits like patience and good manners for granted, and I never realized, until that night of thinking about it, that all these character traits aren't just there but are learned, and that I learned them from people older *and younger.*

I've also learned specific practical things from younger kids. One of the kids I babysit for, his mother's an artist and he knows a lot about art himself. He teaches me things I've never known before, like how you cover oil paintings so they'll last. Sometimes we'll be drawing together and he'll say, "What are you doing?" I'll say, "What? What do you mean?" and he'll say, "Usually you're supposed to draw the object first and then put in the background." He has ideas about things I've never thought about as much. And when I'm babysitting and I don't know how to use the oven or the VCR, it's the smaller child who teaches me how to use it.

My younger brother Sam, who is 12, loves ocean biology and anything related to animals or water. Recently I had to do a report on fish for the Oak Meadow curriculum, which I sometimes use. I asked my brother for ideas, and he was the one who advised me on what to write in a report on the porcupine fish.

My other brother, who is 13, teaches me about fractions and decimals. If I'm working on a problem, I go to him and I can always count on him to know the answer and to be able to help me.

So there is always something you can learn from younger people, not just from your elders.

Just Being Friends Teaches You

From Grace Ritter (NY):

I can't recall a time when I've said, "Oh look, a younger person is teaching me!" But that certainly does not mean that nobody younger than me has ever taught me anything. Just a few weeks ago, a friend of mine who is 12 (I'm 16) taught me how to make a hemp choker, and I'm sure there have been numerous other experiences just like that. I know that I have taught people older than me. For instance, when I work at the Cornell ceramics studio, college students come up to me to ask me how to glaze this or what to do at this stage of throwing a bowl.

I think that just being friends with younger kids teaches you things; it gives you different points of view and different opportunities. In my experience, most school kids can't understand that kids of different ages can be good friends with each other. All of my school friends have friends who are only around their age, but I have friends who are older and younger than me and a lot of times my younger homeschooled friends are more mature than my friends who go to school and are my age.

Being Open to Learning, Not Threatened

From Emily Pryor of Virginia:

I have always been in contact with people younger than me. In my earlier years, interacting and learning with them was natural. As I approached my teenage years, it became harder. I started going through a phase where I wanted to be better than others, and I acted as if no one younger than me could teach me anything. Now, as I encounter more and more situations where the young know more than I, I have realized that I must surmount these feelings. I must forget their age and learn from them because they have as much to offer as I do.

At 5, I learned from a 4-year-old friend. I remember

this scene:

Smiling as I tramped through the woods, I held Tom's hand. We climbed over logs together and finally settled on a place to build a fort. We began gathering long sticks to lean against the log, making a lean-to.

I always wanted my Fridays to be free so that I could be available to play with Tom. He was a wonderful friend. He brought out the child in me and made me laugh. This friendship was born when I took care of him for the first time. I made his day by twirling him around and around. The simplicity of love! After that day, he wouldn't stop talking about me to his family and community.

Every Friday I was waiting. He got out of the car and in momentary shyness would hide behind his mother's skirt. We would soon take hands and spend the afternoon reenacting computer games under his direction. He would also fill my ears with stories about his little sister, "Befany."

Tom taught me a new kind of love, a love that was solely based on acceptance of each other's personality. Tom didn't care what I looked like. We were friends because of the simple actions we exchanged. He composed a song about me; I wrote him little letters; when we were together, we were never out of each other's sight. He reminded me how to use my imagination. A piece of wood became a boat or a laser beam, and our surroundings were no longer woods; they were transformed into backgrounds for video games or a rolling river.

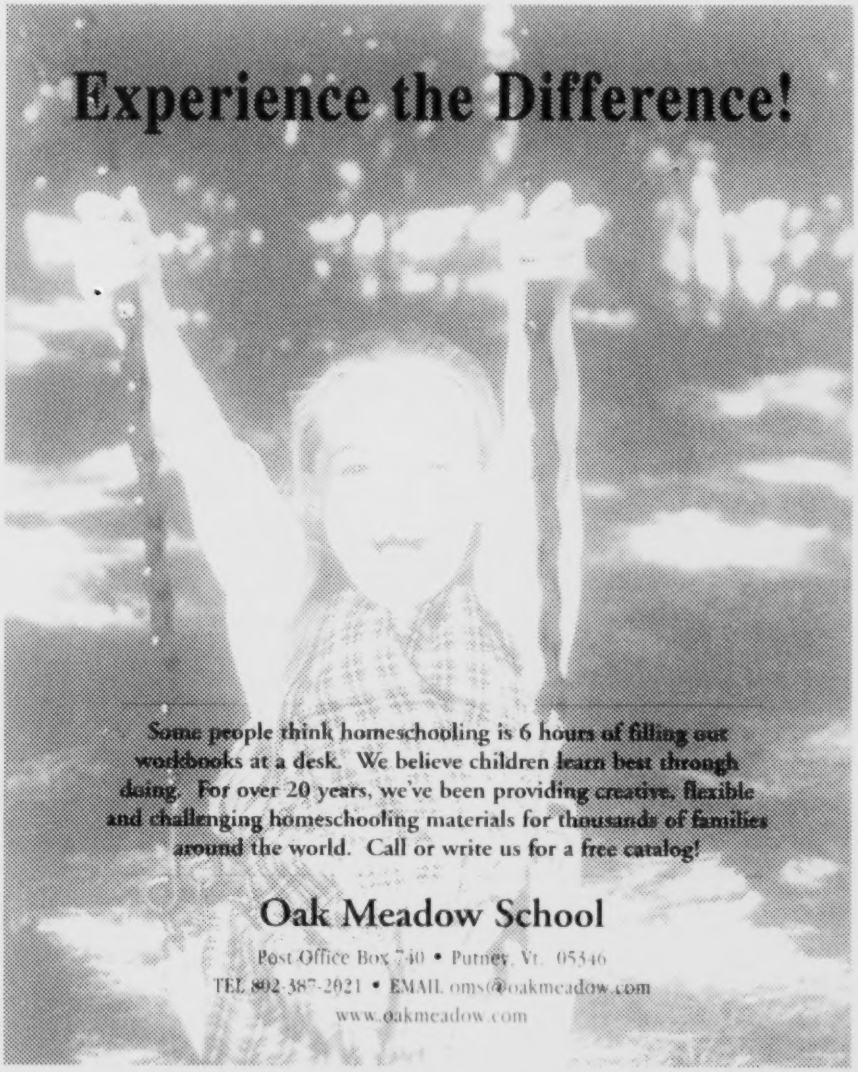
Children Tom's age continue to amaze me. Their vitality, imagination, and speech overwhelm me. Tom was a small friend, but only in size. At some moments, I considered him a best friend. Opening my heart to this child and letting him envelope me in laughter and games reminded me that friends come in all sizes, all ages.

Another person who is younger than I has taught me a great deal and has indirectly encouraged me to grow into who I am rather than stay who I was. Laura and I grew up together and did naughty things. I was older by three years and am sure I initiated all of them. As we aged, I backed off and wanted nothing to do with her and her family. My family moved to a different state and it was easy to avoid her. Whenever she and her family came to visit, I would slip over to a friend's for the night. It was simple, until I realized that I was missing out. From a distance I began to observe Laura, and over time, admiration grew.

First, Laura taught me to crochet. This opened a door, giving us a joy in life to share. I was hooked, and have since been motivated to learn how to crochet hats and then squares for an afghan.

I have always admired the two extremes: extroverts and introverts. I admire introverts because they don't seem to mind just sitting watching people or being in their own world. They take the time to listen and observe their surroundings and therefore become knowledgeable. Although I had admired this quality in Laura and others, I hadn't always understood it or thought it was possible for me. But now Laura has taught me that being an introvert is a trait I can enjoy for myself, too. I do not rely on other people to entertain me. I am more willing to absorb the environment around me quietly, in my own time.

Learning from younger people has humbled me. Although it's natural, I am still experimenting with how to approach it. Realizing that there are so many opportunities in this world, I cannot let a younger person's knowledge threaten me. Instead, I am trying to take advantage of these occasions, allowing those younger to teach me. I have come away a more knowledgeable person, and will continue this way as I become more willing to share and open myself to all ages. ◆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Watching Children Learn

Volunteering at Homeless Shelter

Hannah Kreiger-Benson of Massachusetts writes:

I'm 12 and have just begun homeschooling this year. I have a friend named Sarah whom I have known since I was very little, and we always have a great time together. Sarah's aunt, Karobi, is a nurse at the Pine Street Inn Women's Clinic, and Sarah goes with her and volunteers. Recently I have started going with her.

Pine Street is a homeless shelter. They serve meals and give out clothing. They help people train for jobs and they provide beds, among other things. There are two health clinics there, one for men and one for women.

When we go to Pine Street, Sarah and I usually "do the door." That means that we sit by the door to the clinic and write down the names of any women who come. We give out Advil and vitamins and also things like shampoo or hand lotion. Other jobs include filling film containers with vaseline to give out and putting hot water and green soap in bins for foot soaks. Many of the women are friendly and we often chat as we work.

Sometimes the clients seem a bit surprised that we are young. Once in a while they ask our ages, or who we are, in which case Karobi explains that we are her niece and her niece's friend. Karobi knows almost all of the clients by name and greets them when they come to the door.

Because there is a small staff at the clinic, after we are introduced we know the nurses pretty well. They usually seem happy that we are there, and greet us cheerfully.

It really feels good to know that I'm helping out, and working there gives me perspective on how lucky I am and lets me appreciate all the good things that I have. One time, one of the women was showing us her new slippers and she said you really can't appreciate these things 'til you lose them.

Working at Pine Street can be boring sometimes, when no one is coming to the door. But Sarah and I talk and someone comes soon. Sometimes the work can be challenging, too, like when there are many women who need something and we have to make sure that we write down all the names. It can be pretty confusing!

I really recommend working at some kind of homeless shelter or food pantry at some time in your life. There are many different things that are pretty easy to do and that really make a difference – things like sorting clothes, making bags of food to hand out, or giving out medicine. It's a great experience.

Gaining Comfort with Freedom

Suzanne Soulé (CA) writes:

I was introduced to homeschooling when my sister lent me *The Teenage Liberation Handbook.* I argued with the author throughout the entire book and returned it with the comment that maybe unschooling works for some very outgoing people but it never would have worked for me. Over the next few years, though, as my hus-band and I talked about our school experiences, we both started to under-stand and believe in unschooling. We were both very good students, but felt we were just playing a game where grades were important and learning was not. From junior high through college, I felt I was just marking time until I was allowed the freedom of being a grown-up.

These discussions helped us better understand freedom. My husband left his unsatisfying career in the electronics industry and started driving a truck with a friend. When the friend wanted to change jobs, my husband bought the truck and now drives solo. He is away from home often, but when he is home he is a much better father than he was when he came home at 5:00 tired and frustrated. Now he really spends time with the kids. As Rick found freedom for himself, he became open to letting the kids have the freedom of unschooling.

I'm still not a very social person. We don't belong to a local support group, although I keep meaning to get together with them. I like to stay home, and so do my children, Kevin and Tracy. We have friends at church, but don't get together with them socially. We have a favorite family from church, with kids close in age to ours,

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and we used to get together every week with them, but then they started going to school and don't have much free time anymore. Kevin and Tracy converse very comfortably with adults at church, in restaurants, at the grocery store, and when getting haircuts. The only time Kevin has mentioned wanting to have other kids around is when we were playing our version of baseball, but he quickly followed with a comment about not wanting other kids around very often. Both Kevin and Tracy really just wish they could keep getting together with their friends who are now in school, and we have managed it a few times.

We are very close, geographically and emotionally, to all four grandparents, and family is of primary importance to us. The grandparents are supportive of our decision to homeschool, although they don't really have the unschooling vision. (They even pay for homeschooling expenses, such as subscribing to GWS and buying a set of encyclopedias. I don't spend much, though. I've found that the few things I've purchased go unused because they are so artificial. Our best investment was the encyclopedia set. Other items depend on the children. Kevin loves *The Way Things Work* by David Macaulay, though he had to grow into it. Tracy uses a lot of paint and clay. A $5 globe and free maps have also been helpful.)

Kevin and Tracy are very different. Kevin wants to know how everything works and wants to build real versions of things he sees. (He has to settle for Lego versions. We did string up a skyride using a strawberry basket, but he still talked about where he was going to build the real thing.) He asks questions constantly, but usually wants short answers. He has a good grasp of numbers and math, though he doesn't have many answers memorized. He likes watching videos, and they usually inspire him to learn more about something and to build it ("Pete's Dragon" led to lighthouses, "The Great Race" led to the Eiffel Tower, which led to the Empire State Building, then Charles Lindberg). Kevin is very physical, always wanting to hold my hand or hug me.

Tracy is quieter. She doesn't ask many questions, but she sometimes pays attention to our answers to Kevin. She likes to read, write, and do arts and crafts. She likes to sort and organize and play with small objects. She will hold my hand when I insist, but usually she is running ahead of me. She is more sensitive than Kevin, and often leaves the room during a scary part of a video.

Despite these differences, they play together very well. They make up intricate games and don't want me to interrupt them with suggestions of more schoolish things. They do like me to play certain games with them, though, such as cards and dice. They learned a lot about where U.S. states were when Rick was driving around the country; we would highlight on a map where he was.

I try not to worry about if they are at an arbitrary grade level. Long term involvement is important to learning. As the fable goes, "Slow and steady wins the race."

Fascinated by Numbers

Ruth Matilsky (NJ) writes:

Numbers fascinate 5-year-old Loren, my youngest. He loves thinking about them. They are his solace. We were at a play, and I told him there were seven more musical numbers. That brought him peace, to be able to count each one off. He is the first child in this family who *chooses* to spend his time playing by himself with flash cards. He has done addition, subtraction, and multiplication, and is working on div-ision. He greets guests by asking them if they know what 132 divided by 12 is.

We spent several weeks discussing math together. Over breakfast one day, he asked me what a billion times a billion makes. I didn't know what word to give the answer so I started telling him about talking in terms of exponents – a billion times a billion would be 10 to the 18th. After a few minutes of this, I realized he was catching on to what I was telling him. It was a little scary.

So he has been able to do complicated math problems, and then he will tell me confidently that 12 times 4 is 44. When I tell him it isn't, he is irate and assures me that I am wrong. When I show him the flash card that tells the

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answer, he informs me that "The people who make the flash cards don't know everything."

Then, after a while, I realize that the intense math questions were tapering off. I have to tell you that there was a part of me that would have loved to enroll Loren immediately in some genius program somewhere. When he stopped asking so intensely about math, I was tempted to push him to do more. Fortunately for him, I am a mother of four other children and I have to be very careful about who I prod to do what. So Loren moved from numbers to reading. He didn't completely stop talking about math, he just turned his attention to other matters as well, because he is still talking about fractions and still enjoying them, just not every minute of the day like he was before.

He asked me to teach him to read and I got out the book, *How to Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons*. I know it sounds hokey but they have some very good ideas in that book. True, last year when I attempted to use it with Matthew (now 8) he endured a few lessons and then hid in the closet rather than do any more. *But* I have two friends who saw the book at my house and successfully used it with their children. Anyway, Loren liked the book, but he insisted on skipping a lot of it and just plowing ahead. This was very hard for me, because the directions specifically say "do not improvise, do not skip." However, I remembered how Matthew hid in the closet, and I skipped and improvised with Loren. After about a week, Loren didn't want the book anymore and he started writing instead. All day long. He was sounding out words using the techniques he learned in the book. He said to me, "It's really fun to sound out words – it's like a puzzle." (He likes puzzles.) Oh my god! A child in this family who thinks phonics is fun!

To give you some family history, Sara, my oldest, wanted nothing to do with lessons and just started reading when she was 8. April (now 11) sat studiously with workbooks one year and by the time she was 7 had taught herself to read, but I don't recall her saying phonics was fun. Matt most definitely did not think phonics was fun, and neither did his older brother Jake (now 15). I showed Jake a phonics workbook one time years ago and he was *not* interested.

Loren and Jake do share a disgust with words that are not spelled how they sound. It helps sometimes when Loren is irate because a word is spelled with letters that are silent or pronounced differently from the way they are supposed to be pronounced and I say, "Jacob used to get *so* mad about that." Loren laughs to hear that.

8-Year-Old Enjoys Collecting Coins

Chris Sims (VT) writes:

When is a penny not a penny? When it's worth fifty or even seventy-five cents, that's when! My son Paul (8) picked up on that little bit of information one day while we were looking through my rather jumbled collection of foreign and domestic coins. He quickly decided to do his mom one better by starting an *organized* collection of his own.

So, one recent evening, he dumped the kitchen penny jar out onto the living room floor with the goal of setting aside one penny for each year of the 1900s. That soon turned into a need for two or three of each year once he discovered mint marks and decided that he wanted one of each kind for each year. He talked his dad into making a written record of his collection. As they continued working, the conversation that ensued between them was delightful.

"Hey, Dad! A 1989! That's the year I was born!"

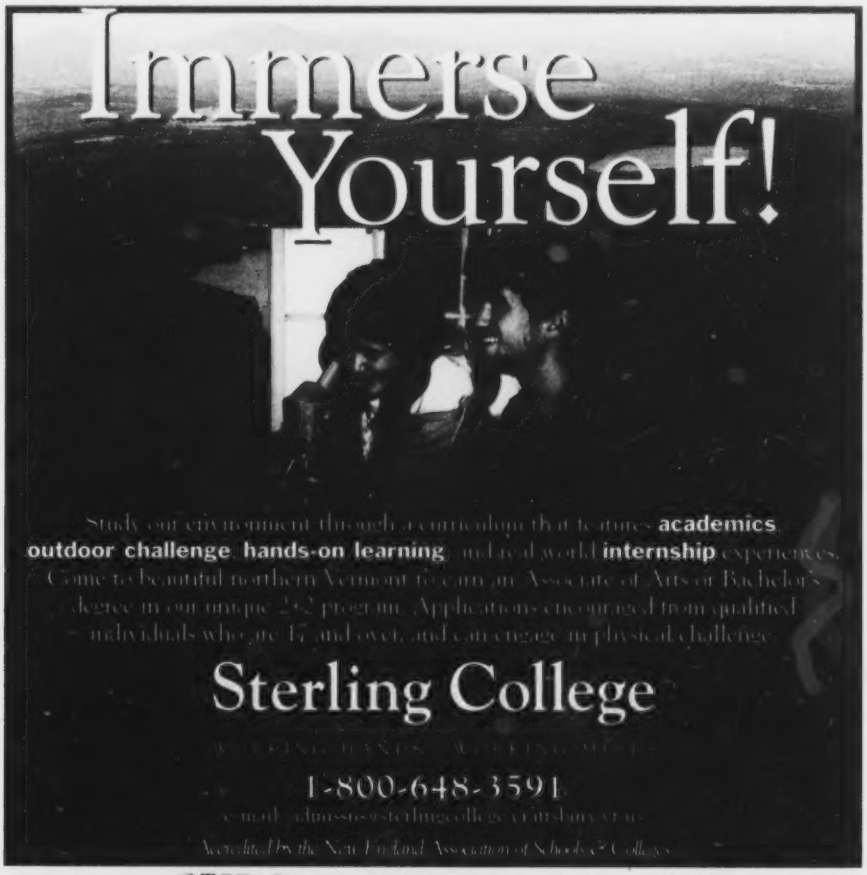
"Yup, and the year the Berlin Wall came down."

"Here's a 1982-D."

"Mom and I were married that year."

"Wow! A 1960! That's *old*. Were you even born then?"

With a laugh, Reed told Paul that his parents were only two years old that year. Paul paused for a moment to digest that image, then dove back into the pile. He quickly filled in the seventies, eighties, and nineties and began substituting duplicates of better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quality. "They'll be worth more when I'm old," he explained. He nearly hit the ceiling when he came across a 1934 penny. Reed told him it had been made even before World War II, but its utter antiquity didn't sink in until he added, "Grammy was only 3 then."

Having gaps in the early 1900s doesn't bother Paul a bit. Our local bookstore sells coins as well, and he's had his eye on a set of shiny, tin pennies minted in 1943, the year that more copper had to go to war efforts than to coin-making. He knows he can fill in his collection any time he has a few extra boring pennies – the kind only worth one cent – to spend on this new investment. At the coin rack, I watch him scan the fading dates back into the days of no TV, brand new electricity and horse-drawn carriages. Just as contemplatively, he jumps into the future. "You know, Mom, if I sell my collection when I'm fifty, I'll be rich!"

He may well be. As for me, all I have to do is stand by and watch him learn and I feel rich already. ◆

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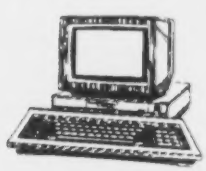

Homeschoolers and Dropouts:
Bridging the Gap

Pam Davis publishes a zine called *drop out* and runs the drop out resource center in Sacramento (1114 21 St, Sacramento CA 95814; 916-441-5526). Both the zine and the center provide information about alternative education, homeschooling, youth liberation, testing out of high school, and work, college, and travel options. In the January issue (issue #5), Pam wrote about attending GWS's anniversary conference and the California Home=Education conference this past summer. She says, "I discovered that the homeschooling movement has a lot to offer and a lot to teach us about how children learn and how families can create what works for them. ... Many people were excited about the *drop out* zine because they've always felt that those kids who aren't part of the homeschool community need support and access to resources too. They seemed to think *drop out* was a way to bridge that gap."

To continue to bridge that gap, and to explore the connections between what we call homeschoolers and what we call dropouts, Pam and I began corresponding. Here are the exchanges we've had so far:

Susannah Sheffer:

I WAS INTERESTED TO SEE so many references to homeschooling in your latest issue of *drop out* and especially to see people beginning to explore the question of how to bridge the gap between dropouts and homeschoolers. You and I both get calls and letters from teenagers who have just left school. Suppose one leaves and calls it homeschooling and the other leaves and calls it dropping out. In each case, it's two kids who don't think school has much to offer them and who walk out of that building. They might even both have doubts or fears about what they've just done. But then it seems to me that (or at least this has been true up to now) homeschoolers have some things on their side that dropouts are less likely to have:

(1) Legal sanction, which is only an issue if you're under 16, but teenagers I've known who have left school at 16 or older often go through the trouble of registering legally as homeschoolers anyway, and I usually advise them to do just that, despite the burden of paperwork.

(2) Less social stigma. Sure, homeschooling raises eyebrows and often leads to lots of questions from friends, neighbors, relatives, the checkout clerk in the grocery store, you name it. But it's also gaining more attention and I think it's accurate to say that if you say "I'm homeschooling" you face less criticism than if you say "I'm dropping out."

(3) A welcoming community of people, including adults, who support the decision to leave school. This seems really important. When all the ads and messages say, "Stay in school!", being able to call a homeschooling organization, for example, say, "I've just left school," and hear an adult say, "Good for you! Welcome to the world out here!", is no small thing. And those adults have developed a fairly sophisticated critique of schooling, so they'll encourage teenagers to fault the school, rather than themselves, for their inability to make it there – which is also no small thing, it seems to me, given school's usual tendency to say that if a student fails in school there's something wrong with the student.

(4) Parental support. I often say that one of the key distinctions between a homeschooler and a dropout is that a homeschooler has her parents' support for being out of school and a dropout doesn't, or doesn't usually. But there are exceptions to this on both sides, and I find that it's in those exceptions that the distinction between homeschoolers and dropouts becomes blurrier.

(5) Examples of other young people who are out of school and doing fine, with lots of specific examples of exactly how they've learned things or followed up on interests or found resources.

I'm interested in how dropouts can get any or all of these things. I realize that not all dropouts will want to be homeschoolers in the legal sense, and the importance of being legal may vary depending on the circumstances (I'd be interested to hear your take on that). But what about support, resources, and attitudes toward oneself? Do you see dropouts being able to draw upon the homeschooling community in these respects, or do you think there's more the homeschooling community could be doing to reach out to dropouts in these respects? I imagine your zine, resource center, and discussion groups address exactly these points in various ways, so I'd love to hear more about how they do that and what you think about these issues.

Pam Davis:

TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS about differences between homeschoolers and dropouts, I first have to explain that most of the teenagers I come into contact with, and many of our contributors, don't represent what you might think of as the "statistical dropouts," although I'm also starting to see the differences blur. Most of the dropouts who associate themselves with the tone and content of the newspaper

actually have a lot in common with homeschoolers in many of the areas you mentioned, and together with homeschoolers make up the small fraction of all the kids leaving school who are getting out more deliberately. The rest of the dropouts for me are still a mystery. They are still largely a statistic, but one that I would very much like to see the face and hear the voice of.

Now I'll speak to the similarities and differences between homeschoolers and the dropouts I do have some knowledge of. First of all, most of the kids I know don't seem to worry too much about the legitimacy question because they feel very comfortable knowing thay have "dropped out" of a system they don't agree with at all. Also, around here, the option of testing out at 16 with the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE) is extremely common. If they need for it to sound more legit they can simply say they graduated early. Many of them go directly into community college where, once you are there, it really makes no difference if you finished high school or not.

Homeschooling, on the other hand, seems to carry a bigger stigma with a lot of people I know, which is precisely why I covered it in the last issue of *drop out*. I wanted to show that homeschoolers were not all fundamentalist reactionaries who want to "protect" their children from the real world, which is what a lot of people seem to believe. The teenagers I meet don't usually consider homeschooling as an option because: 1. They've already tested out legally. 2. They see homeschool as "school" (because they identify it with "Independent Study," where they have to do school work at home and check in with a teacher every week). 3. They don't want their parents as their teachers. What I try to get across to everyone is that homeschooling doesn't mean your parents are replacing your teachers and are giving you lessons and all that. I explain that what it often ends up being is the kids pretty much doing what they want to do and the families figuring out a way to document it and call it homeschooling. I think this information should be useful to any of those kids who are having a hard time convincing their parents to let them drop out.

This ties in with the question of parental support. I have been surprised to discover that a lot of the dropouts I meet did have parental support for leaving school, but perhaps only after months of working on their parents to convince them. I've noticed that the high school students who come around here, the friends of the dropouts, also hate school but don't leave because their parents would never sign them out. The key shift happens as a result of these kids working really hard to show their parents that they know what they are doing and that they have a plan. So I have to say that one of the differences that I've always perceived between homeschoolers and dropouts is that homeschooling seems usually to be parent initiated while dropping out never is. But I've also always seen this as a positive strength of dropouts, because when they finally get out they know they have done it for themselves.

This goes back to the legitimacy question. There often is a stigma associated with dropping out, and negative reactions from family, teachers, and friends, but as one of our staff told me, he "got over it." I asked him how he did that. He said, "I was working it out with myself. It wasn't up to anyone else.... First you have to be OK with yourself, then you find support for it." So, speaking of support, it's very true that there isn't an established community for dropouts like there is for homeschoolers, which I suppose is exactly why I do the newspaper. But the tradition of the critiques of schooling and the voices in favor of options and alternatives can be the support for dropouts too, even when the authors are coming out of the homeschooling crowd. The body of literature that serves as the homeschooler's arsenal (John Holt, John Taylor Gatto, *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, for example) is our arsenal as well. I've noticed that many homeschooling families are advocating autonomy in learning for all kids, which helps everyone.

Because of what we are doing in Sacramento, having a dropout resource center, there is a growing community of support here, including examples of young people who are doing fine. So when we do a workshop on the CHSPE, for example, it consists of bringing together those who have taken the test and those who are thinking about it and basically sharing information. Outside of Sacramento I don't know if anything like this goes on. The letters we get from teenagers all over the country pretty much show how glad they are to know that they are not alone.

I have been surprised to discover that a lot of the dropouts I meet did have parental support for leaving school, but perhaps only after months of working on their parents to convince them.

In some ways I would really like not to make distinctions between homeschoolers and dropouts and instead just throw all the information out there and they can weed through and use what can work for them. It all applies to both. It all falls into the catagory of what options are out there for someone who is unhappy where they are and would like to get out. I've noticed that homeschoolers (those who really are "unschooling themselves") are not satisfied with the label "homeschool" because it really doesn't reflect what they do. Likewise, the label "dropout" might be a misnomer because, just like homeschoolers, they actually are becoming much more involved in their own lives, whereas "dropping out" can sound like bailing. As I've said, those that are comfortable being in opposition to the system are glad to be seen as rejecting it. But do we always have to define ourselves in terms of what we aren't doing? What word explains what these teenagers are doing? What term would represent becoming an autonomous being and thus governing your own life and learning?

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Susannah Sheffer:

Your comments are interesting. It sounds as though there are some particularities to the situation in California that aren't precisely true elsewhere, which may make a fairly significant difference to young people there (I'm thinking of the CHSPE in particular). But, beyond this, I'm interested in the distinction you make between the kids you hear from and what you describe as "statistical dropouts." Is the chief distinction, in your mind, that the kids you know have developed a critique of schooling and are happy, even proud, to be rejecting it, whereas a different kind of dropout – the kind the media tends to refer to – leaves feeling badly about himself, feeling that he can't make it in that system but ought to be able to?

I'm thinking of an article by Jane O'Reilly that I discuss briefly in *A Sense of Self*. O'Reilly is talking about the effects of marginalization, of choosing not to identify with the values of the dominant culture (particularly on the part of students of color), and she says that these students, "confronted with a demand for conformity that they recognize correctly as irrelevant, disrespectful, and boring, may simply choose to drop out. They see no connection between school and their own future. Unhappily, they choose the kind of resistance that is oriented toward short-term survival instead of long-term liberation." The implication here, of course, is that rejecting school and its values will inevitably hurt the student in the long-term, and of course both you and I question that notion. But I can see that if a student leaves school but somehow, even if only deep down, equates that with not being good enough, not being able to make it where it really counts, the student will be struggling with that demon throughout her adult life. That's why having the critique of schooling available seems so important. I can understand what you mean about the dropouts you know being *more* like homeschoolers than other dropouts because they do have that critique.

But ultimately I think one needs more than just that critique, and this connects with what you said about dropping out being a misnomer because the kids aren't simply withdrawing. I remember facilitating a discussion group years ago with a group of kids, almost all of whom had just left school that fall. One girl said, "For so long I've defined myself in terms of what I'm against, but now I'm realizing that I can put my energy toward things I care about and want to do." This seems like such an exciting shift, and I wonder if you see that sort of shift in the kids you know or hear from. In the various kinds of support you offer, how much emphasis is on ways to get out of school and how much is on what you can do once you are out?

This reminds me that I'm interested to hear more about what you offer and what young people seem to be looking for when they come to you. What kinds of things came up at the open house discussion you recently had, for example? What do people who come by the resource center tend to ask about or talk about?

Pam Davis:

I think that one distinction between the various dropout kids could very well be whether they feel OK about dropping out and/or if they have developed some kind of critique of schooling, but I was specifically thinking about the factors that determine which kids get that: namely economic class, ethnicity, the parents' educational background, etc. These things themselves are enough to influence someone's dropping out experience. So the ones that feel good about themselves because they had a supportive radical community to drop into probably had access to that community as a result of those factors I mentioned.

So when I talk about the "statistical" dropouts I'm refering to the ones we as a society worry about (either on their behalf or in fear of them!): poor kids, kids of color, kids from abusive homes, kids who abuse drugs or alcohol, pregnant kids, kids in gangs, etc. A zine like *drop out* won't reach hardly any of these kids. A teacher in Sacramento schools came to one of our getting out of school workshops and was very supportive of the ideas being discussed. She said she was really impressed with how verbal, smart, and confident all the teenagers at the discussion were, and pointed out that they would obviously be OK no matter what they chose to do, but that was definitely not true for the kids she taught. She then put me on the spot and asked if I had an answer for those kids. I had to say sadly that I really didn't. She said "That's OK, neither do we."

Now I feel I'm coming up with some partial answers. If poverty is a predicting factor as to whether kids generally do well, in school or as school dropouts, then it seems obvious that poverty is the problem to be addressed. I understand that in many communities of color, which are typically impoverished and denied access to society, school is seen as the way out. I can't pretend to know better than them on this point because I went to school, and I haven't had to fight to overcome any of those obstacles. But I think I can say with some confidence that the critique that is necessary is one that exposes schooling as one of the strongest contributors to economic disparity, discrimination, class divisions, hatred, concentrated wealth and privilege. I won't go into it more here except to say I agree with those who want community solutions, community schools, and I think that homeschoolers, especially those who have created homeschool co-ops and homeschool-friendly charter schools, are an example of the potential for helping build real alternatives for poor families and poor dropouts, meaning the models are out there.

I don't want to downplay the role of *drop out* zine and our new resource center at all because I believe that all kids need support. But it's not enough yet, and I'm very aware of our limits at this point. I wouldn't be doing this, though, if I didn't get feedback week after week about how glad people are that we exist and how crucial a role *drop out* has played in their struggle to have their own life.

Now I'll finally answer the question of what we do offer. Primarily I see myself as sort of a clearinghouse for information and examples. I've created a forum (much like GWS is for homeschoolers) for those who have

something to say about their direct experiences with schooling, their successes and failures, their ideas, etc. The physical office space was a logical extension of this concept and is now a place where people can go and meet like-minded others. So I guess I don't really emphasize anything except dialogue of all kinds: in print, while hanging out at the office, and in planned workshops. For the dropouts themselves (and the friends still in school who they bring along), the second one seems to be the most important. It may sound silly, but I don't really do much. I mean I work really hard at organizing the center and making sure that whatever someone might need is there and I probably spend way too many hours there, but as far as individual kids goes? We all "just" hang out. When people hang out here the conversation of course is often about school, but it's just as likely to be about something else. Since a lot of the people who come by are our volunteers or zine staff, we talk a lot about stuff that relates directly to running the office or planning the next event or whatever ideas people have. As I get to know people, we always end up talking about what they are doing now and what they want to do next, and then their friends who are in school talk about how much they hate it, and then maybe three months later one of those friends ends up taking their proficiency test and leaving high school. But it's not like I'm the support and they are the receivers of it. We all support each other in our struggles to do whatever it is we are doing. They are my support too.

Susannah Sheffer:

You raise such important points, and I'm not going to pretend to do them justice here, but I'll throw out a few quick thoughts before we open this up to the GWS readership.

Whenever people say that confident, articulate kids would be OK no matter what, I always think of my friend who left school at 15 and, a year later, was met with that same criticism: "Of course self-educating works for *you*, because you're so smart and enthusiastic." She said, "But I wasn't like this at all last year!"

I persist in thinking that that is precisely the point, that, as Holt said in *Instead of Education*, "What people become under one set of circumstances tells us little or nothing about what they might become under another." Yes, I agree that "winner kids" will in some sense perhaps be winners no matter what – that certain advantages, including or perhaps especially the advantages of class and family background, will serve in any situation. But at the same time, I fear that the person who says "those kids will be OK no matter what" is primarily being dismissive of the idea that anything important and duplicable can be learned from such kids and their experiences. That I can't accept. *Maybe* it's true in some cases that the student who is thriving outside of school would thrive anywhere. But there are plenty of kids who weren't thriving at all in school, and if those same kids are now doing well outside of school, that's important to understand.

Regarding your point about community solutions, Holt wrote that he had come to believe that the quality of life as a whole educates more than what happens in school, and thus that it seemed off the mark to be working to improve schools when so much else in kids' – in any people's – lives so badly needed improvement. Housing, food, safe and interesting neighborhoods with many opportunities, adults doing meaningful rather than degrading work – all this would help kids' *learning* more profoundly than new curriculum in the schools. So he would agree, as do I, that the problems to be addressed run deeper than school itself. I think of Toronto homeschooling parent Jutta Mason's comment in GWS years ago that homeschoolers are potentially a help to faltering communities because homeschoolers need to rely on community resources to a much greater degree – their libraries are the town libraries, for example, not the school libraries, so they will care that much more about the quality of those libraries and will demand or work for improvements if necessary. Taking this comment and interpreting it more broadly, it seems to me that if people stop thinking that improving schools is the only (or the best) way to improve the conditions in which kids can learn, the discussion will automatically become broader and more community-based.

Holt would also agree, of course, with what you say about exposing the idea that school is *not* a guaranteed way out of poverty or racial discrimination – you may have already read his *Freedom and Beyond* on this topic but I'll mention it in case others haven't. Others have written about this as well, including families of color. That's one of the reasons I think the essays in Grace Llewellyn's book *Freedom Challenge* are so important.

Finally, the piece in GWS #97, "Neither Home Nor School – Finding a Third Alternative," has always seemed to me one of the most important pieces we've published in terms of this question of helping a broader range of kids be out of school in a positive way. The piece looks at what options there are when a young person isn't happy in school but home isn't much better. Our interview with Alan Shaw in GWS #94 about his work with dropouts was important too, because he's one of the few people I have heard about who doesn't automatically try to convince inner-city African-American dropouts to return to school. And, stories about the Pathfinder Learning Center (GWS #114, #117) and other efforts such as you describe or refer to, which make it possible for a broader range of kids to be out of school, also seem important to me. As you say, the models are out there, even if only in the beginning stages. And this is where I come back to the question of building on existing examples rather than dismissing them.

In the end, I think the question of how to help homeschoolers *or* dropouts comes down to a matter of hospitality, in the sense that Ivan Illich, David Schwartz, and others have described. That's really what's common to any of these models we've been talking about, it seems to me. Kids are so often told, "You don't belong here." When kids or their families want to escape school, that escape and the life that follows it are both made much easier if there's a welcoming community on the other side of the wall. ◆

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11a. Do you have children? ❑ Yes ❑ No
11b. If so, what are their ages?_____
11c. Please circle the ages of the children who read GWS.

12a. How often do you attend homeschool workshops, conferences, or retreats?
❑ 4 or more per year ❑ 1 - 3 per year ❑ Rarely ❑ Never
12b. How often would you like to attend homeschool workshops, conferences, or retreats?
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13 How do you spend your money as it pertains to your child's/children's education? (check all that apply)
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14a. Have you purchased materials or services advertised in GWS? ❑ Yes ❑ No
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15. Where else do you purchase educational materials?
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❑ Retail stores ❑ Internet ❑ Other_____

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Resources & Recommendations

Math Game

From Lorraine Hoyt (ME):

In our family, we play lots of word games and enjoy them, and I've wished for years for a math game that would be as much fun. I've finally found one. Krypto is a simple card game that is played by computing – adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. When they were younger, both my children hated arithmetic and resisted learning times tables or doing any kind of drill. Although they are now 16 and 12 years old and one just finished calculus and the other is doing algebra, they still avoid computation. But they love this game because there isn't one right answer and they don't just compute. They have to figure out how to take five random numbers and use the basic operations of arithmetic to reach the objective number. Because they are trying to find a way to do this before the other players manage to do it, and because they lose points for errors, they must be quick and accurate.

Since playing the game, Zach has been doing area and volume problems in his algebra text and getting the right answers when he is multiplying large numbers, where before he would have made careless mistakes and then become discouraged.

We bought the basic Krypto set, with whole numbers to 25, and the supplementary fractions set, which increases the challenge. We ordered them from Chinaberry, Original Krypto for $7 and fraction Krypto for $5. (Chinaberry Book Service, 2780 Via Orange Way, Suite B, Spring Valley CA 91978 or phone 1-800-776-2242.) The game is made by MPH Games and their catalog is available at PO Box 1125, Fairfield CT 06432.

Geography Game

Marion Webster (MA) writes:

My 7-year-old son Jake and I have had great fun playing the game "Discover America." The point of the game is to travel through all the states, accumulating money by guessing a state capital correctly, answering a quiz question (history, geography, etc. facts) correctly, or receiving a "Lucky" card. All players have the option to make the trip, and the player with the most money at the end wins.

Sounds like a run-of-the-mill, schoolish type of game, doesn't it? Well, we found otherwise. There are choices of how to take each turn (spin to name a state capital or roll dice to get a Quiz, Lucky, Sorry, or Traveler's Aid card) and choices of what attitudes and motives to have while playing. Our motives were to have fun, try to win, and see if we liked the game. At the most, I hoped for a fun time together with my son and for him to gain some familiarity with a map of the United States. I had no serious "educational" agenda, and we adjusted the rules to fit Jake's ability level. For instance, when he spun the dial that picks a state for capital-naming, we decided that his task instead was to find the state on the map and then read its capital. When it was my turn, I found that I knew so few capitals even though, in my memory, I did so well on those tests in school. In fact, I'm having fun trying to relearn them in the context of the game. Similarly, although the Quiz Card questions were largely over Jake's head (and very often over mine, too), we would give choices of questions and offer clues like the first letter of an answer.

I believe that since there was no educational agenda (which Jake can pick up in a minute and then be turned off), he was free to "go with" this game in whatever way interested him. One morning I found him studiously tracing the U.S. map which comes with the game. He then invented a Jeopardy-like game where there was a point-reward system for naming capitals. He's been delighted to quiz his parents and reward us or not with points!

Interestingly, the inventor of the game, Alan Gadzinski, dedicated it to his former 10th grade teacher because "she took the time to care and show me the way." For info: Second Avenue Creations, 1-800-713-1105. ◆

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1998 Directory was published in GWS #120.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those who ask to be listed, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a (H), the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

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GA — Robert & Colleen WILLIAMS (Kallan/86, Ashlan/93) 759 Henderson Falls Rd, Toccoa 30577

HI — Jeanne & Jason AMAS (Joshua/84, Jessica/85) Christian Homeschoolers of Kauai, 4416 Hanamaulu Pl, Lihue 96766 **(H)** ••• Dina KAGELER & Tim TUNISON (Jesse/91, Emma/93) Volcano Homeschooling Hui, PO Box 411, Volcano 96785

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WI — Brad & Georgene KUNZE (Stephen/86, Megan/88) S3646 N Bent Tree Dr, Baraboo 53913 **(H)**

WY — James & Cheryl KELLY (Meghan/90, Joseph/92, Laura/95) 3678 Hwy 241, Afton 83110

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1998 Directory (GWS #120)? Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

Other Locations — Robert & Majella FIEDLER (Katie/84, Brydie/86, Michael/89) Box 7559 MC, Toowoomba 4352, Queensland, **Australia (H)** ••• Law & Peggy WATKINS (Nathaniel/74, Sophia/79) Nangiaretu, Malakara via Edayaranmula, 689532 Kerala, **India** ••• Alec & Shoshana SOCHER (Naomi/86, Anna/88, Coby/91, Daniel/95) 19 Bialik, Jerusalem 96221 **Israel** ••• Tara & Yoichi OHTA (Rie Elise/91, Gen Daniel/93) 1312-4 Iijima-cho, Sakae-ku, Yokohama **Japan** 244 **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations (in GWS #120):

AK: Homeschoolers Unlimited, 392D Kenal Av, Ft Richardson 99505-1227; 907-428-1022; gsanty@galenaalaska.org

MA: Medway/Millis support group, Donna Bigony, 508-359-5910 ••• Nashoba Valley Unschoolers, Andy Migner, 118 Cobleigh Rd, Boxboro 01719; 978-635-9847

MO: SHELL (Springfield Home Education: Learning for a Lifetime), c/o Leah Rosenthal, 810 S Kickapoo Av, Springfield 65804; 417-866-4017

NJ: Educational Excellence-School at Home, PO Box 771, Summit 07901; KindPals@aol.com

PA: Bucks County Homeschoolers (formerly Diversity-United in Homeschooling), 125 Mountain Oaks Rd, Yardley 19067; 215-428-3865; renee321@juno.com ••• Valley Unschoolers Network (Lehigh Valley area), c/o Kiernan, 4458 Coffeetown Rd, Schnecksville 18078; 610-799-2742

Address Changes:

CA: San Diego Home Educators, 619-270-7581 (new phone # only)

IN: Indiana Assoc. of Home Educators, 850 N Madison Av, Greenwood 46142; 317-859-1202

(continued next page)

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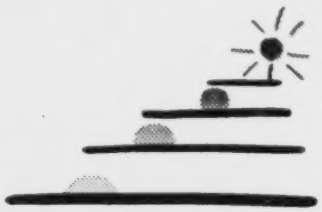

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PA: PALS (People Always Learning Something), 105 Marie Dr, Pittsburgh 15237; 412-367-6240

Japan: Otherwise Japan, owj@tkb.att.ne.jp (new email address only)

Delete:

AK: Alaska Homeschoolers Assoc

Additions to Resource People (complete lists were published in GWS #121):

Certified Teachers:

MA: Linda C. Butler, 15 Eastman Rd, Somerville 02143; 617-628-5802 (early childhood ed, special ed, mental health counselor) ••• Mary Jo Moore, 282 Linden St, Berlin 01503; 978-838-2789 (K-12, adult ed) ••• Heather Sczuroski, 30 Mayfield St, Seekonk 02771; 508-761-8382 (K-3)

Professors:

OR: Brian D. Ray, Nat'l Home Education Research Inst, PO Box 13939, Salem 97309; 503-364-1490 (address change)

Psychologists/Psychotherapists:

Michael Abrahams, 18 Executive Park Ct, Germantown 20874; 301-428-3557

Resource People:

Down Syndrome: Beth Stanley, Northside Villa Apt B-5, 2711 Allen Rd, Tallahassee FL 32312; 850-386-3711

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put your address on your letter. To be listed, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. ••• Taryn CHAYKOWSKI (11) 18 Hammond Rd, RR 1, Brantford ON N3T 5L4 Canada; reading, drawing, violin ••• Etienne Pemberton RENAUD (8) 754 Wiseman Av, Outremont Quebec H2V 3K6 Canada; reading, science, airplanes ••• Alison RENNIE (11) 743 Hookers Mill Rd, Abingdon MD 21009-1146; fun things ••• Abby McBRIDE (13) 224 Bay St, Taunton MA 02780; swimming, reading, animals ••• FRONDEN, 21303 Heathcote Rd, Freeland MD 21053: Elise (7) art, swimming, outdoors; Lily (5) drawing, dance, gymnastics

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or proscriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

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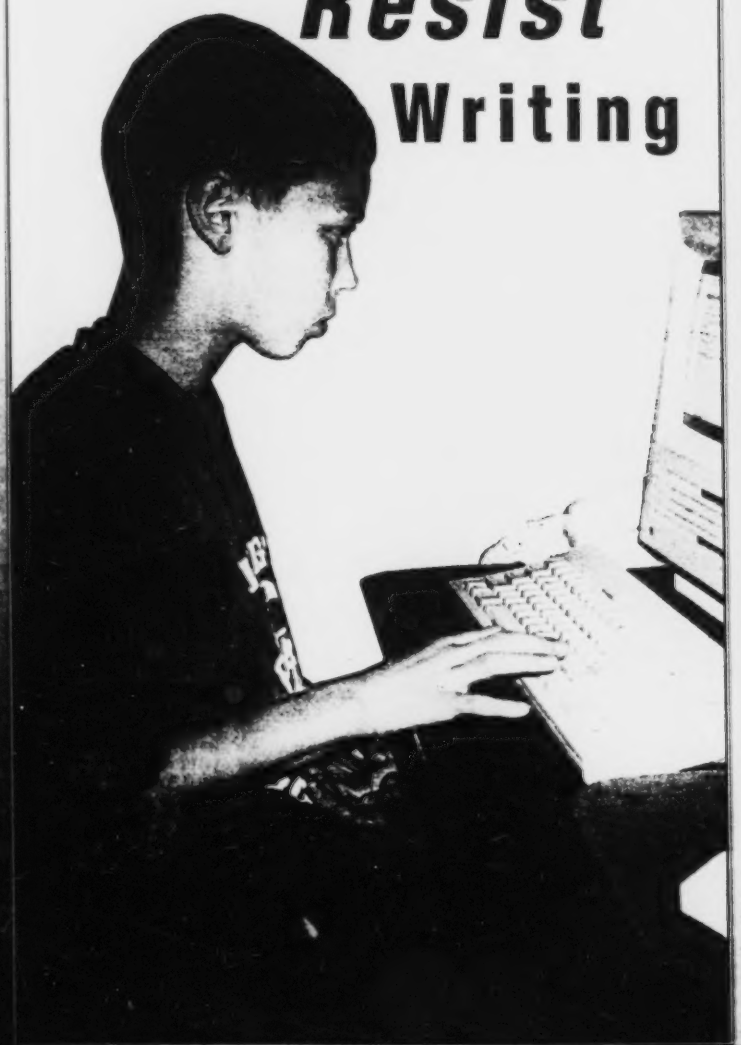
Overcoming Fear and Shyness

Homeschoolers In College:
Yes, these students are different

Test-Taking Experiences

When Kids *Resist* Writing



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FOCUS: Overcoming Fear and Shyness p. 12-16

Some kids find it hard to join new activities or enter into new experiences. What makes it easier? What can parents do to help?

Homeschoolers in College – Yes, These Students are Different! p. 17-21

Homeschoolers routinely get admitted to college, but what kinds of students do they become? Here, two homeschoolers write about the challenge of maintaining enthusiasm and self-direction in a college setting, and an admissions officer shares observations about the homeschoolers at her school

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ISSUE #123
JULY/AUG. '98

GWS

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SEE WHEN KIDS RESIST WRITING, P. 4.

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From the Editor

You know those stories you read in GWS or hear at support group meetings about homeschooling kids working at internships or joining groups or traveling away from home? Those are all the really confident kids, right? Not the shy ones, the fearful ones, the ones who aren't immediately comfortable jumping into a new experience.

Well, actually, no. It's easy – too easy, unfortunately – to assume that if someone *is* doing something, that means she wasn't afraid to do it. It's easy to split kids into two groups in one's mind: the fearless ones who get involved in things, and the shy, timid ones who don't. I hear parents make this split when they say something like, "My daughter loves animals, but I can't imagine her working with a veterinarian like that girl in the last issue of GWS. My daughter's just too shy."

But maybe that girl in GWS was shy too. Maybe being shy or afraid doesn't have to mean never doing the things one wants to do. A homeschooler I know who went off on a big adventure told me that afterwards, friends and acquaintances repeatedly exclaimed, "Wow, I can't believe you weren't afraid!" "Who said I wasn't afraid?" she answers. You can be afraid and do the thing anyway.

The real difference isn't between kids who are afraid and kids who aren't. It's between those who let the fear keep them from doing what they really want to do and those who find a way to do it anyway. Parents and other adults can make a crucial difference here. If we assume that being afraid is sufficient reason *not* to join an activity, or if we assume that kids can't join until they're no longer hesitant or shy, then, indeed, kids with initial hesitations will probably join fewer activities. But maybe we can learn to believe, and say, something like, "Well, if this is something you really want to do, being afraid doesn't have to stop you. Most people are afraid, or at least somewhat hesitant or unsure, about trying new things. The trick is to learn how to cope with those feelings and still do what you want to do."

The young people who write for this issue's Focus openly acknowledge feeling scared, shy, intimidated, or hesitant before walking into a new art class or going off on a three-month internship or joining a team. Yet they're also quite clear that these were activities they truly wanted to do and felt proud, even exhilarated, after completing. The discussion here is not about activities that truly feel wrong, that one truly feels unready for or unsuited to. The young people are talking about activities they genuinely desired, even as they feared them.

These kids provide a comforting but also inspiring reality check. Sure, other people are scared. All those kids you hear about who do interesting things don't have some special characteristic that allows them to plunge in fearlessly every time. They've just been able to figure out how to carry on even with the fear.

– Susannah Sheffer

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News & Reports

News Briefs

How many homeschoolers?

Dr. Patricia Lines' latest working paper, *Homeschoolers: Estimating Numbers and Growth*, confirms that homeschooling continues to grow at an impressive rate. Dr. Lines writes, "Based on analysis presented here, it is safe to say that homeschooling has at least doubled in the five years between the 1990-91 school year and the 1995-96 school year. ... Given the available evidence, the total number of homeschoolers in the 1990-91 school year may have been around 350,000 children nationwide, and may have been around 750,000 in 1995-96. Based on limited evidence from four states, the number is growing, at a rate of from 7-15% per year. Assuming the larger growth rate, 1,000,000 children could be homeschooling by 1997-98."

Spreading the Word

In March, Pat Farenga participated in a panel discussion about homeschooling that will be broadcast in September over National Public Radio. Pat, Walt Grayum (president of Mass. HOPE, a statewide Christian homeschooling group), and Dr. Mary Anne Pitman (of the University of Cincinnati), fielded questions from the audience and from the moderator, John Merrow. Several children and teenagers asked questions or made comments, and the discussion was lively and interesting. To find out when this edition of The Merrow Report will be aired, check www.pbs.org during August or call our office at that time.

Other such opportunities we've had recently include Susannah's speaking at a conference on Social Ecology in Montreal this past April and on the NPR show "Public Interest" in May (along with HSLDA's Scott Somerville and two DC-area parents) and Pat's article, "Homeschooling: Creating Alternatives to Education" in the May 1998 issue of the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society Studies*. You can download a copy of that article off our website, www.holtgws.com, or order the complete issue from Sage Publications, 805-499-0721.

News from our office

As we go to press, we've just signed a contract with The Express Group, a company in Michigan that will be able to handle all our fulfillment work – filling book orders and processing subscriptions. Since it's been a continuing challenge for us to cope with rising overhead costs and other expenses, we're excited about this opportunity to run the business end of our work more smoothly and economically. For now, we'll continue to have phone and mail orders come directly to our office (we'll then forward them to the outsourcing company), so subscribers and book customers won't have to make any changes in how they reach us. We're looking ahead to being able to have the company receive orders directly, and we'll keep you posted on those developments. And just so we're absolutely clear: nothing else is changing except who enters and packs your orders. All other aspects of our work and our organization remain the same.

Calendar

July 10-12: Homeschool and Family Learning Conference in **Boxborough, MA**. Workshops and exhibits. For info: 207-657-2800; royala@mindspring.com

Aug. 7-8: Homeschool and Family Learning Conference in **Livonia, MI**. For info: see above.

Aug. 15: Homeschooling for Everyone, by the Rocky Mtn Education Connection, at Teikyo Loretto Hts University in **Denver, CO**. David & Micki Colfax, Cafi Cohen speaking. For info: Cindy Stanley, 303-341-2242.

Aug. 21-23: Home=Education Conference in **Sacramento, CA**. Victoria Moran, Ed Dickerson, Mary Griffith, Donna Nichols-White speaking. For info: 760-248-7631.

Sept. 14-18: 9th Annual Oregon Unschooling Chautauqua near Cascade Head, Lincoln City. For info: SASE to Oregon Chautauqua, c/o Kim Gordon, 5125 SW Macadam Av Suite 200, Portland OR 97201 or send email to ann@outoftheboxpublishing.com

Sept. 25-27: Growing Without Schooling annual conference in **Great Barrington, MA**. For details, see the back cover of this issue of GWS, or call us at 617-864-3100. ◆

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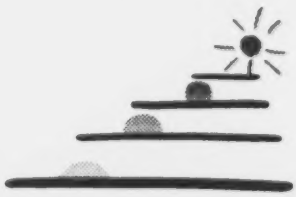

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When Kids Resist Writing

These writers are responding to
a letter from Sue Klassen in GWS #121

The Physical Act vs. The Creative Act

Milva McDonald of Massachusetts writes:

Like Sue Klassen, I am the mother of an active, curious 10-year-old who has shown little interest in the physical act of writing. Except for two years (grades 1-2) in an alternative private school, Eric has been homeschooled. While his classroom teachers were not big on seat work, they did require a minimum of paperwork. Even then, this was not something Eric was drawn to.

Our homeschooling philosophy has essentially been unschooling, but over the past year or so I've spent a lot of time thinking about whether this approach will continue to work. This reevaluating has come about partly as a function of my children getting older (my daughter is 13) and partly because their father and I are divorced and he is concerned about their skill levels in academic areas and whether they are "ahead of" or "behind" their peers. I've tried to settle on a compromise approach, but for the most part the one thing I've required on a daily basis is math. Eric is very close to completing the Saxon 65 textbook, quite an accomplishment for him.

When he first began working in the Saxon, his actual writing of the numbers was so sloppy it was difficult to read. I thought the daily act of writing out the problems would eventually produce neatness, but it hasn't. His answers are legible enough, but his writing remains on the messy side. His biggest problem in working on the math lessons, in fact, has come from this difficulty with neatness. Properly lining up columns in multiplication problems, for instance, is essential to getting the right answer. Eric's solution is to use vertical lines to keep the columns straight. While this works, it's still unacceptable to someone like his father, who feels that using lines somehow signals a lack of intelligence or ability.

Eric's handwriting is also sloppy, and he hates the act of writing longhand. He has received much pressure from his paternal grandparents about this, especially his grandmother, who talks often with him about the necessity of learning printing and cursive, and sends him copies of the cursive alphabet to practice with. The times we've tried traditional approaches to handwriting have been horrible battles, and I decided it simply wasn't worth it. The only thing Eric can write in cursive is his name, which he learned so he could sign bank deposit slips. In printing, he primarily uses capital letters. When he uses lower case letters, they're often not proportionate with the upper case letters. Yet if he spends enough time, he can write a short note neatly enough, as we saw when it was time to write thank yous for holiday gifts. The process was clearly painstaking for him, and not enjoyable. Interestingly, he would always put off writing to his grandmother until last, and then come up with a note that was barely legible.

I really wanted Eric to try his hand at writing as a creative act, but it was clear that combining this with pencil and paper would be a disaster. So we turned to the computer, which Eric was already using for making fact sheets and statistical charts on his favorite subject in the world, basketball. As we talked about writing, it became clear that Eric wanted to be able to write but was having difficulty coming up with ideas. At first this seemed amazing, since Eric's energy and curiosity are notorious and he has been referred to by some as an "idea man." His problem did not really lie in lack of ideas but in the newness of composing a piece of creative writing and in the quandary many writers face: how to begin. Since his biggest love is basketball, and all his reading (besides devouring *Calvin and Hobbes* books) centers around basketball books and the sports page, it seemed logical that he might want to write about that. I threw it out as an idea, and started suggesting possible topics.

He bit, and last December he put together a magazine called "NBA Cool Stuff," complete with a 1998 projected finish and articles titled "Team of the Century," "Who Rules the Rim? NBA Top Ten Slammers," and "The New Dynasty." In the end, he came up with all his own ideas and really enjoyed sitting at the computer composing his articles. When he finished a piece, we would sit down and talk about punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing. At first he incorporated none of this, but I was amazed at how quickly he began using periods and capitalizing the first words of sentences.

Shortly after the holidays we finished reading Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves* trilogy out loud, and Eric liked the books so much he decided to write a sequel. He's currently written only about three or four pages, and who knows how far he'll get, but he's enjoying himself.

One thing I've noticed in both these writing projects is the way Eric successfully imitates style. I don't believe he thinks about it in this way when he's writing, but it's clear that he's paid close attention in his extensive reading on sports and his listening to our reading aloud together. His "NBA Cool Stuff" articles are bright and upbeat, with varied sentence structure and plenty of commentary. The novel, which he's calling "Julie on the Tundra," is written in a much simpler style, reminiscent of Craighead George's lovely, austere prose. The fact that Eric is imitating style in no way detracts from the originality of his pieces – he is definitely expressing his own ideas and opinions, and creating new storylines and characters. And imitation is a tried and true, completely natural step in mastering any discipline. I've observed, too, that

although Eric (unlike his sister, who began writing spontaneously at the age of 4) has not formally written consistently from a very young age, he is still able to write at a level of maturity appropriate to or greater than his years. Perhaps this is because he has read and been read to often. It also fits in with what I've observed as his lifelong patterns of learning – he seems to be clueless about or incapable of certain tasks one day, and the next day he performs them with ease and competence.

To Eric's grandmother, and maybe to a teacher if he were in school, the fact that he doesn't print well means he can't compose a piece of writing. But that simply isn't true, and I'm grateful that Eric has had the opportunity to learn and explore in his own way and avoid being labeled.

Over the last few weeks Eric has seemed to be taking a break from writing, and I won't push him. Our experience with these two writing projects has clearly shown me that Eric is not only a competent writer but that he also enjoys writing, and I feel confident he will return to it.

Grown Homeschooler Hated Writing as a Child, Loves it Now

Rebecca Auerbach (CA) sent us a copy of a letter she wrote to Sue Klassen:

I'm a recent graduate of unschooling who is seriously thinking of a writing career. When I was your son's age, I had no desire to write so much as a letter. Like you, my mom was optimistic 95% of the time and spent 5% worrying that I'd never learn decent writing. My recent interest and skill in writing has been a relief to her, and I hope that may reassure you and help reduce the percentage of your worry time.

I wish I'd had your son Nathan's clear head about the subject when I was 10. I would have saved myself and perhaps my mom a good bit of worry. Instead of reassurance, all Mom got from me was "I hate writing!" and "I'm just no good at it." It's odd now to look back at a time when I thought I'd never be able to enjoy writing or to write anything I could be pleased with.

Rebecca sent a copy of a piece she wrote a year ago about her writing experience:

I had trouble learning to write in public school, and my bad experience there made me hate writing for years. In kindergarten, I was able to produce tolerable printed letters if I worked very slowly and carefully. In school, though, slowness was considered a greater fault than bad work, and a child who did not complete an assignment before the bell rang was obviously lazy and needed to try harder.

Having been raised thus far to take as much time as I needed to do things well, I never considered doing sloppy work. Yet how was I to create anything worthwhile in the few measly minutes my teachers allowed me? The pressure frustrated and frightened me. I was hurt and angry when the teachers assumed I was lazy. I cried and cried when, after I worked intently on a writing assignment and failed to complete it on time, my first grade teacher kept me in from recess to impress on me the importance of "trying harder." She ordered me to promise I would be faster next time, a promise I didn't believe I could keep. Any school official will surely tell you of their school's commitment to instilling in children the virtues of perseverance, hard work, and honesty. Yet here my teacher was punishing my diligent efforts and extracting a false promise from me.

By the time I left school (after a week of first grade), I was sure I was no good at writing. I was ashamed. For years, I hated to write so much as a shopping list, especially if anyone was going to see it.

My mother was stumped. Other subjects gave her no concern, for I learned them eagerly and naturally. But how could she get me to learn this one important skill that I could not bear to study? She knew more pressure was not the answer, for that was what had made me hate writing in the first place. No attempts to "make writing fun" succeeded for more than a few minutes. Having run out of options, Mom gave me what I needed most. She allowed me not to write. She gave me time to leave behind my miserable classroom experience and the anxiety it had given me. Only when that anxiety faded would I be able to see that writing need not be the wretched job school had made it.

It took me five years to relax. While all my little friends struggled or yawned through years of reports, spelling words, and grammar and vocabulary lists, I scarcely wrote a fraction of what they did. Mom taught me cursive writing when I showed an interest in it, but all I wanted was a demonstration of how it was done. Now and then, she would get anxious about my penmanship and assign me to do some exercises. These assignments made me so unhappy that Mom rarely gave them. After a while, she dropped them entirely, realizing that they did more harm than good. Likewise, she assigned school-style writing projects

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only once in a great while.

And did we – my goodness! – neglect the essential skills of punctuation, grammar, and spelling? Not quite, but we spent very little time on them. When I wrote a thank-you letter or did one of my few writing assignments, Mom usually looked it over and pointed out the errors. One day in 1990, when I was 11, she had me write ten spelling words, from "Aaron" to "absolutely." She said we would work our way through the alphabet, but she never bothered with spelling words again. I never did grammar or punctuation exercises.

When I was nearly 12, Mom urged me to keep a diary. I agreed to try it. She told me not to worry about writing well and said she'd like me to show her a bit of what I wrote, but only what I did not mind sharing. I didn't show much, not because I was writing secrets but because (despite her advice not to try to write properly) I was still nervous about letting anyone see how badly I wrote.

Secure in knowing that my writing was private and that I did not need to write more than I chose (on some days, I simply put down "Nothing happened"), I began to enjoy myself. Jotting down the day's events was relaxing, and I liked the thought of being able to get out my book years later and seeing exactly what I'd been up to when I was 12. I paid no heed to my writing style, and whenever I was mad, I made my handwriting as bad as possible.

After a year and a month of diary writing, I decided to write a *Star Trek* novel. I had been a *Star Trek* fan for some years, and one day, while daydreaming about the *Trek* universe, I thought of some characters and a story that seemed perfect for a book. My sudden desire to write a book surprised me. I had thought I would always hate writing and had resigned myself to never being any good at it. Yet here I found myself inspired to write a book and confident in my ability to learn how!

On my own initiative, I went to the library to find myself some books on writing. I came home with one from the kids' section and two from the adults' section. Though I remember reading the kids' book (*How to Write Creatively*) carefully, I can no longer recall whether it was useful. I took a closer look at one of the other two and decided it was not what I wanted. The third book was Strunk and White's classic *Elements of Style*, which was so helpful that I bought myself a copy (I still refer to it frequently).

Having finished these two books, I began to write. I worked very slowly and carefully (it now occurs to me that my former teachers would have disapproved), enjoying the process and feeling proud of the results. I stuck with my book for several months (though I didn't work on it very often, that being a particularly busy time of my life) and completed three pages. For a 13-year-old, they were good pages.

How had I learned to create good pages? No one had actively taught it to me, and I cannot credit it all to those two short books I read. How did I figure it out on my own, suddenly and with hardly any practice?

I could write because I could read. I had loved books all my life and read

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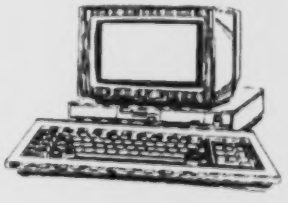

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hundreds of them without having ever been ordered to do so. I knew how a well-written novel looked.

By the time I was 14, I had abandoned my book and writing in general. I had not given up in despair nor returned to my old feelings about writing (though I still was not ready to write an assignment; Mom tried giving me one, but I hated it and did a poor job). I had simply gotten bored with *Star Trek* and not been inspired to write about anything else. For the next two years, I stuck to writing only thank-you letters, as before. However, I no longer minded writing them.

The summer I was 16, I tried writing again. I was inspired this time by my interest in politics: I decided to write to a Senator about a piece of legislation about which I felt strongly. I tried to write in the style I had seen used by political columnists (having been fascinated by current events for the previous two and a half years, I had read a great deal of political commentary). And that's when I found that I loved to write. By the time I had finished that first letter, I knew I wanted to write more.

I have been writing ever since. I began with more letters to politicians about every proposed law on which I had an opinion. In January of '96, when the local library got Internet access, I took to posting political arguments on discussion boards. Though I sometimes asked Mom to look at my writing and make suggestions, she could rarely suggest more than the occasional change in wording or correction of a grammatical or punctuation error. No matter; I was able to improve my writing on my own, through practice, careful thought, and analysis of what I liked or disliked about things I read.

In the fall of '96, I took an English class for high school credit at the local two-year college. I chose English 100, "Preparatory College Writing." The class was just below college level, intended for students who could write at tenth- to eleventh-grade level. I was at the age (17) to have just finished eleventh grade. "OK," I thought, "now I'll find out if I've caught up."

I had. I got a B on my first essay and A's on all subsequent ones. I also did well on grammar and punctuation exercises despite never having done them before. Twice, the teacher used my writing as an example for the class. The next semester, I signed up for "Critical Thinking about Literature," unaware that it had a prerequisite, a composition class that I had not taken. Nonetheless, I got 100% on all my essays for that class. The professor, considered one of the toughest English teachers at the school, called my writing "outstanding."

This is not to suggest that I got to class already knowing it all. For one thing, I had almost no idea of what an academic essay was supposed to be, much less how to structure one. And I learned countless things about writing in general: I now do better at *all* my writing than I did before taking classes. I succeededin my classes as much because of what I learned in them as because of what I already knew. Unschooling gave me not only my love of writing but my habit of setting out to learn instead of waiting for people to stuff facts into me. I listened carefully, fussed with my essays until I believed they were good, and asked questions whenever anything was unclear. I enjoyed myself very much. And I learned.

Easing His Way into Writing

From Karen Raskin-Young (AZ):

My son Jeremy has also had difficulties with writing. As a young child, he was very verbal and loved thinking up stories or other ideas for writing, but the physical act of writing was very taxing and tremendously slow. Typing was even worse because of the time it took him to find the letters on the keys. So through first grade and much of second (at home) he wrote several dictated stories, and I mostly just let him play at writing (and typing).

I was teaching college classes part time on some weekends, and on those days I tried another approach. I would carefully print brief stories I'd made up, leaving blanks for individual letters in some words. Jeremy would scramble out of bed each morning, eager to read what I had left him, and he would have all the blanks filled in before his father woke up and he could share his new story. These filled-in blanks were the equivalent of a few words' worth of letters, but they were more fun for him than doing "writing practice" or some type of assignment. Because of his interest, I expanded the idea until I finally got carried away and left so many letters in individual words blank that he couldn't make sense of the stories. Even so, the process filled a number of purposes, including making our separations more fun and manageable. I think it also helped ease his way into writing.

Jeremy used to think he didn't like writing, but I was sure he *did* like it because of what happened to him when he really got into it. Writing is still physically tedious for him at 13 and, perhaps for this reason, he often has trouble just getting himself to begin. He can write faster now, though, without so much tremendous dawdling. He's full of plans and ideas, has entered writing contests, and really enjoys putting his thoughts on paper. But getting to this point took patience, some pushing, and a little ingenuity. ◆

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Challenges & Concerns

Scared by Test

Celeste Land of Virginia writes:

For my daughter Leila's first grade year, we had to fill out some paperwork at the beginning of the year, submit a curriculum for language arts and math, and agree to some form of testing or evaluation to be submitted to the state at the end of the academic year.

My fellow unschoolers gave me a lot of conflicting advice about how to comply with the state's evaluation requirements. Some families designed portfolios and submitted them to a trained evaluator. Others used one of the many standardized tests on the market. Some families got around the evaluation requirement by claiming a "religious exemption" (one available option under our state's law, but not a viable option for our family), and others ignored the laws altogether and remained underground.

After much deliberation, we concluded that administering a standardized test in the privacy of our own home would be the best option for Leila. I ordered a copy of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), along with a practice test booklet.

Up to that point, I didn't think testing would be problematic. After all, Leila was reading everything in sight, and her mental calculating abilities were far ahead of mine at the same age. Besides, she came from a long line of highly successful test-takers. How hard could a first grade test be?

The test booklets arrived in the mail, and Leila was eager to give them a try. We sat down one morning, sharpened pencils in hand, and opened the practice booklet to the first section. My jaw dropped. The first three sections dealt with phonics – identifying initial and final consonant sounds and medial vowel sounds. Leila could read every word on the page, but she had never studied phonics and definitely did not read phonetically. The test designers clearly had intended to begin the test with something easy, but this would not be easy for my child.

Somehow Leila made her way successfully through the parts involving initial and final consonant sounds, but she didn't understand the vowel section at all. She didn't even know what a vowel was. I tried to explain the concepts of long and short vowels but found myself snapping at her instead. We wound up skipping that section altogether and moved on to sight reading, which she found much easier. We then stopped work on the practice test for the day.

That night, Leila awoke with a nightmare. I didn't think much about it, until the following evening when she announced that she was too scared to go upstairs and eat dinner with the family – even though we were having pizza for dinner. Finally I learned what her nightmare had been. She had been trapped in a haunted house – taking a test!

I was stunned. Could one simple practice test have such a disturbing effect on a 6-year-old child? Clearly it could. Leila and I sat on the couch together, eating pizza and discussing the test. I explained to her that the test was not that important and that she could already pass it with a high score even without the phonics. I apologized for snapping at her over the vowel sounds. I explained that I hadn't learned to read phonetically either and still found phonics concepts somewhat nonsensical. "I wasn't angry at you, I was angry at myself for not being able to explain it to you," I admitted. This led to a discussion of why the phonics were on the test at all, and how even adults couldn't seem to agree on what the best way was to learn to read. "Many grownups think that if you don't understand phonics, then you can't learn to read at all," I explained. "Does that make sense to you?" Leila, who had taught herself to read by listening to others read to her and by poring over beginning readers and toy catalogs, found this rather strange indeed.

I brought the practice test downstairs, and we skimmed over the rest of it together. Leila was somewhat reassured to see that most of the rest of the test (reading comprehension, vocabulary, usage) was much easier for her. Soon she was able to go upstairs again, and the crisis was over.

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This should have been the end of the story. Yet now I was the one waking up in the middle of the night with scary thoughts. The practice test had revealed gaps in my daughter's education! Leila didn't know phonics! She didn't know her punctuation or capitalization rules! She would not get a perfect score on the test! She might be behind her schooled friends! Something must be done! I went out and bought her some phonics software (which she enjoyed for a time) and made up some sentences for her to punctuate and capitalize (which she found boring).

Fortunately, at this point destiny intervened. A friend returned my copy of John Holt's *Learning All the Time*, which I had lent her three years earlier. The book could not have re-entered my life at a better time. As I reread Holt's insightful comments on reading and mathematics, suddenly the absurdity of the standardized test became apparent.

The test designers had assumed that my daughter spent her days in school, studying "language arts and math" most of the week with only a couple of hours spent on extra subjects like "science, social studies, art, and physical education." They had assumed that children could not read well until they had mastered "reading skills," that children could not write well until they had mastered spelling and punctuation. In math, they had assumed that you must master adding one-digit numbers before you can add two- or three-digit numbers, that you must learn to add before you subtract, multiply, or divide, that you must know the names of the coins before you can count with them.

None of these assumptions fit my child. Leila couldn't answer questions about phonics, but she could read almost anything in sight. She couldn't spell, punctuate, or capitalize, but she could dictate incredible stories and lengthy, eloquent letters. She hadn't memorized all her addition facts and she could never remember which coin had which name. Yet she could do most of the math in the game Monopoly, keep track of her allowance money, and count out change for the bus. Furthermore, none of the test had anything to do with the untold

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riches of our homeschooling year, a whirlwind of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Mary Poppins, messy science experiments and cooking projects, electronics sets and Legos, postcard exchanges and pen-pals, surfing the Worldwide Web and exploring desktop publishing, field trips to some of the best museums in the country, family vacations to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, gymnastics, ice skating, and more. What was really important here, anyway?

After a while, I came to the embarrassing conclusion that I had projected my own past testing performance and expectations onto my child. I had been a highly competitive and successful test-taker during my school days, and at that time I thought that my test performances said something important about who I was as a person. Those days are long gone, but evidently a small part of me still foolishly clung to those dangerous ideas.

Now I realized that Leila didn't need to do exceptionally well on the test to continue homeschooling, nor would a high score boost her self-esteem. All she needed was a passing score (which in Virginia is quite low) to comply with the letter of the law.

I'm writing this in February, and at this point, Leila and I have agreed to forget about the test until late spring. I explained to her that while the test was a necessary evil for this year, we would try to make it as painless as possible, spreading it out over a few days if necessary and ending the process with some sort of treat and celebration (I believe she has a certain indoor playground in mind). Next year, I will seriously consider submitting a portfolio to a trained evaluator in lieu of testing. Testing has indeed been an educational experience for our family, but not in the ways I would have expected!

Is Algebra Necessary?

Alison McKee (WI) writes:

I read with interest Barbara Kay's "Rethinking Algebra Anxiety" in GWS #120 and I have some thoughts to add to the discussion. Our family has a long history of unschooling, and one would think that, for our children, letting go of algebra would have been easy. It wasn't. For Christian, our oldest, the decision to discontinue studying math, after he had learned arithmetic, brought him to tears. He had the deep-seated fear that without algebra, college would be unattainable. Mind you, these were the worries of a 14-year-old who was light-years away from making the college decision. He simply knew he couldn't see himself slaving away at something which brought him no joy because he *might* want to attend college in the distant future. At that time, he was immersed in his fly fishing. We encouraged him to go with that passion and forget algebra. With reluctance, and yet great relief, he did.

Four years later, Georgina traveled the same path. She, too, made a stab at learning algebra, but decided to put it aside in favor of pursuing her interests in drama and singing. For Georgina, it seemed as though the decision to drop algebra was a bit easier to make. She's always been quite outspoken about not wanting to go to college, so for her the issue of limiting her future options wasn't as great. She also saw Christian ultimately succeed at attaining college admissions and scholarships in spite of all the rumors she had heard about the college admissions process (like the need for college prep classes).

When we encouraged Christian to go with his instincts and learn all he could from his interests, we were pretty sure his studies would lead to an adequate college preparation if, indeed, that is what he eventually wanted. We knew that algebra had, as Susannah said in her response to Barbara Kay, "come to be used, or viewed, as a sorting mechanism, separating the college-bound or academically tracked kids from the others," but we also knew that Christian's talents lay in language arts rather than in math and science. In fact, I'd often remind him of this when he fretted about not being strong in math. I'd point out that his mathematically and scientifically inclined friends didn't speak foreign languages, engineer radio shows, or sing Rachmaninoff's "Midnight Vigil," as he did, and he'd relax. He'd remember that not all college-bound students are

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equally gifted nor do all colleges have the same admissions requirements.

So, we continued to encourage him to do the things which brought him joy and forget the rest. Our method paid off handsomely. When Christian decided to go to college, he studied *some* algebra and took the ACT. Overall, his score was high, in spite of a 50th percentile ranking in math. The point is that, by following his interests, he was able to master language arts skills and use those strengths to bolster his overall ACT score.

When Christian began the process of applying to colleges, his portfolio made it clear that his interests, aside from fishing – which became his science – were entirely language arts-based. Today his political science major at Kalamazoo College requires three courses in the math/sciences. He must take one lab science, one statistics class, and a third class of his choice in that area. He took his first and only lab science class and aced it. Currently he is taking a statistics class and feels prepared for the computer-based work he is doing. His next math class? A seminar based on Hofstadter's book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. The book is, from what I gather, a discussion of the math of music, art, and logic. Christian is excited about taking the seminar and likes the professor, who he says has a gift for making math understandable to the non-mathematically inclined. We never thought we'd see the day that Christian was excited about math, and yet we knew it wasn't worth it for him to sacrifice the joy of learning to become proficient at solving equations. We also knew that every college is different and that there are plenty of excellent colleges that offer alternatives to traditional course work in calculus and physics. Not only has Christian not been hindered by his teenage decision to put algebra aside but I believe in many ways he has benefited from it, because he has no math anxiety. He has found ways, even in college, to study math in much the same way he did as a homeschooler – through his interests. ◆

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Overcoming Fear and Shyness

Leaving Home for an Internship

From Selina Hunt (NY):

When I left for Washington, DC last September to begin a three-month internship, I was quite apprehensive. At 16, I was going to be the youngest intern the National Women's Health Network had ever had, and I was going to be working in a field I knew little about. This was to be my first experience working in an office, 9-5, four days a week, and was by far the longest time I had ever spent away from home.

When my cousin first suggested the idea of my spending three months in DC, living with her and her family, and doing an internship of some kind, my immediate reaction was, "No way! What a great offer, but I can't do that!" She mentioned it could happen that September (which was only two months away) or the following one, and I started to get excited, while postponing my nervousness, by assuming I would do it the following year. Then my parents encouraged me to think of doing it that same year since I had no plans for the fall.

I started to consider possible internships. My cousin had mentioned a few options, one of which was the National Women's Health Network, where she had worked for many years. One of the interns the Network had lined up for that fall had cancelled and there was a space open. I needed a resumé as well as a writing sample to apply, and pulling those together on short notice was nerve-wracking in itself. When my application was accepted, I felt things were really falling into place, though I was still quite scared and kept thinking to myself, "Can I really do this?" I think the fear came from every part of this experience being new. There was nothing familiar about a single thing I was about to undertake. And yet, what could be more exciting?

My family drove me down to DC and the trip was interspersed with little bouts of, "Oh my gosh, this is ridiculous, we have to turn around, I can't handle this!" But we kept on driving, and the closer I got, the more my excitement outweighed my fear.

My first day came. I think ascending the stairs was the hardest part. My mom accompanied me up to the fourth floor, and it felt like the fortieth. I soon found there wasn't much to be nervous about, though, because the Network was geared toward a new batch of interns every three months and didn't expect me to know everything right off the bat. I got settled into my new living environment and got accustomed to taking the Metro, and I started to feel really comfortable as well as proud of myself that I had pulled this off. Not to say that everything was perfectly easy from that point on, but the fact that I had come this far really helped me feel stronger and able to take on challenges and make hard decisions.

The whole experience of living away from home and having a job felt like a big step towards growing up, and that was kind of scary. Even though I've had a wide variety of experiences and been out in the world in many ways, this really felt like I was separating from my childhood and moving on to a new part of my life. I was comforted to feel that I didn't have any pressure to go on to something else right after this and that my parents were ready to welcome me back home where I could stay until something else came along.

My parents were very helpful throughout the whole experience in that they supported and encouraged me when I would begin to feel it was all over my head. When I was hesitant, they encouraged me with "Why not?" They showed me the pros and pointed out how there weren't many cons. They helped but also kept their distance; this was definitely my decision. I finally decided, "Yeah, OK, scary as it is, I'm going to do it." A few other things that helped me to feel comfortable were that though I was living away from home, I was living with family. Also, I got in touch with DC-area homeschoolers and took part in a literary club they had just started. I spoke with my parents and brother frequently over the phone and kept in touch with friends by email. I encouraged myself by thinking that I would go into this new part of my life and just do the best I possibly could.

Talking with Parents Helps

From Joshua Amas (HI):

I have a tendency to resist group experiences. I think I'm like this because I fear that I might not do a good job.

One of my first group experiences was karate. This was hard for me because I had to do all these moves which

required a lot of discipline; I had to do the blocks over and over to make them perfect. Looking back on it now, I see that it was almost comical: on the two days a week when I knew I had karate, I would nag my mom constantly, saying, "Do I have to go to karate tonight?" I don't know what I was thinking when I said this over and over; I guess I was hoping she'd say I didn't have to go.

My mom was firm and told me that yes, I did have to go. She said she'd decided that karate was important. I think what helped me get through the first six months was having my dad and sister there; we all started karate together. After attending karate regularly, I was finally ready to take the test for my next belt. Obtaining my next belt was probably the turning point for me. I was confident now and began to enjoy the training.

The discipline I've learned from karate has helped me in other areas. Piano has been another activity that I initially resisted and have had to work hard at. Now I'm glad I've stuck it out and that I have the skills. The same goes for learning to surf. My dad has been encouraging me, and takes me and my sister surfing. At first it was difficult and embarrassing with all the good surfer guys out in the water. I'd want to go when there wasn't anyone around, and my mom would say, "You can't have the water all to yourself."

I've learned that I *am* good at things, and people often comment to my mom how verbal I am. I guess I appear confident – they don't know the internal dialogue that always goes on. It's become kind of a joke in my family, my initial resistance to new activities. I can see in myself that I really do want to do well at things.

My parents encourage me to participate in different activities that they think I might like. What helps me is that we talk about what we do. This constant communication keeps me going even at times when I might have quit.

Acting Confident

From Kate Mende-Fridkis (NJ):

Normally I'm a very confident person. But becoming confident takes practice. I can't recall being uncertain of my feelings, but my mother remembers telling people "She's not shy" about the little 3-year-old hiding behind her legs. Since Mom always told me I wasn't shy, I didn't feel inclined to live up to that timidness and eventually grew out of it.

I'm not usually shy nowadays, but when I walked into my new Hebrew school 6th grade classroom, I felt completely out of place. I felt like I didn't belong there, but I threw back my shoulders and acted as if I walked into that class every day. When the teacher introduced me, I greeted everyone with an enormous smile and kept it plastered on my face even though my jaw was aching. I was popular right away. Of course, it doesn't always work that way, and in some situations it takes longer to become recognized. I still don't feel "in with it" there, but I don't show it.

That was a story of shyness, but there was another time when I was truly petrified. A couple of friends and I set up a band. I'm the lead singer and we mostly give concerts at nursing homes. One day we had a real concert with an audience of around 150 people. Now, maybe a kid who's an actor or professional pianist will say, "Just 150? I've been in front of 300!" But for me, my knees were shaking all the same. By the time I got up to the microphone I was feeling a little faint. I thought to myself, "I can do it." Then I took a more pessimistic approach: "It will be over in 15 minutes anyway." But the thing that really did it was when I said to myself, "When it's over, I'll go home and write about it in my journal and, whether it went well or terribly, my kids will read about it when I'm gone and maybe think about how hard it was for me to do that." I sang and though my voice cracked once or twice I had a wonderful time.

I think that to overcome timidity, you must show the world that you're a confident person. Once you take up that attitude, you will grow into it and become that kind of person.

Fear of Failure

From Amber Weller (RI):

I was born shy! As a child, I was always afraid to try new things, and even now, at 17, new activities can be hard for me to start or get involved in. But with the help of my family and friends, and my own effort to overcome my fears, I have joined in on many activities, some of which have helped me gain more confidence in myself and have made it easier to try other new experiences.

It seems with every new experience that comes my way, I go through a ritual of questioning myself: Should I do this or shouldn't I? What if I make a mistake or do something stupid? What will the others think of me? What if they're mean or unfriendly? What if I fail? How can I fit this into my schedule? and on and on. This apparent lack of confidence and tendency to resist change drives my parents crazy and is a part of myself which I'm working to improve, but it's not easy. The key issue with me is that I'm afraid of failing and of what other people are going to think of me if I do fail. But deep down, the reality is that I see myself doing all sorts of activities. I share these dreams with my parents and they help me find ways to get involved. If it weren't for their encouragement and inspiration and sometimes nagging, I probably would have missed out on some great opportunities.

One of the experiences that has had a lasting effect on me was when I wanted desperately to learn a martial art. The local YMCA was holding a Jujitsu class for children, but when it came time for me to sign up, I was reluctant and refused. My mother let it pass for the time being, but when it came time for the next session, she brought it to my attention again. I was still reluctant, but she knew that I really wanted to do it and that my fears and shyness were sealing my fate. Mom persisted and signed me up for the third session under the agreement that I would attend three classes and if I didn't like it I would not have to continue. This arrangement made me feel more at ease.

I remember walking into the classroom and discovering that I was the only girl out of twenty or so boys. I felt really intimidated and out of place. But by the third class I wanted to stay and learn Jujitsu, even though I was still

nervous about being there. That all began to change as I got to know the instructor. His voice was loud and boisterous and happy and he explained things in a way I could understand. His positive attitude gave me confidence in myself. My fears began to get less intense and I started to act like the real Amber. All of this didn't happen instantly, though; it was probably over a period of two years that I finally got comfortable with the class.

I'm still taking Jujitsu, and three years ago I earned the rank of brown belt. Now I not only participate in classes, I help teach as well. I have come a long way since that first day of class, not only in Jujitsu itself but in how I've grown inside. Since that first step, I've participated in acting, writing, and cooking classes, and joined baseball, soccer, and golf teams. I even forced myself to audition for a major motion picture. It was the longest seven minutes of my life! With every new experience I begin to feel less intimidated. I have learned not to care about failing. I know now that if I never fail in life, I will miss learning from my mistakes. Failing doesn't bother me as much anymore because I know that learning will follow.

If I find myself wanting to try something new but still feel a bit apprehensive, I might seek out a friend or my brother, sister, or cousin to join me in the activity. Also, there is a quote from T.S. Eliot that I try to keep in my mind: "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go." And if, in spite of everything, I slip back into my old habit of reluctance, I submit myself to rehab: a prod and nag session with Mom or Dad.

Daring to be Interviewed

From Dori Griffin of Tennessee:

My family laughed when I was asked to write for this Focus; they asked if I'd be able to choose just one of my myriad experiences with shyness. There's my volunteer work in the office at my church, my decision to try college even though I'm mostly terrified of doing so, the time I joined a ballet class full of girls several years older than me, the time I spoke at a meeting for homeschool moms, the time – well, you get the picture. But what I kept coming back to as I thought of what to write was a couple of experiences with media interviews I had last fall as a result of my editing *Inkwell*, a literary magazine for teens. The more I thought about it, the more universal it started to seem.

Last September, a dad in the local homeschool group helped me to set up a newspaper interview. He works at the paper, and he passed the rather general letter I'd mailed to him along to another reporter, who then called to set up the interview. In a moment of inspired bravery, I'd mailed a letter that had landed me in an alien and scary situation. Writing is worlds easier for me than speaking to people I don't know well. It was a real shock when I first started editing to realize that I'd have to deal with people, too, not just paper and computers. But this business of media relations was ten times worse. What if I sounded stupid? What if I totally failed to communicate what the magazine was all about?

The morning of the interview I was extremely nervous. My mom helped me stay marginally sane by being calm and confident herself. There wasn't much she could do; it was more a case of just being there for me. All along she'd encouraged me to try, just try, and to feel good about doing that much. I think parents would like to think there's some magic button they can push to make hard things easy for their kids, but so often the most valuable thing they can do is provide moral support – and unconditional love. No matter what, I knew both my parents would be proud of me for whatever I'd accomplished. They added no pressure to the situation. That in itself was a huge help.

After all the stress and worry, the interview itself was actually a lot of fun. The reporter seemed really interested in what I had to say, and she was positive about the magazine and its purpose. I'd dreaded a reporter who would've had a heyday making veiled criticisms, putting things in a bad light, or just simply focusing on the fact that I didn't go to school. Instead, I had a pleasant and interesting conversation and discovered a lot of neat things about journalism, art magazines (a college experience for the reporter), and interviewing techniques. What a relief!

About a month later, a local television station called and asked to do a short segment on me and the magazine. The same worries flooded back in, only magnified. I'd read *Air Frame* by Michael Crichton – I knew that television news media was a nasty business. They'd be out to get me for sure. More hours of nail-biting, more classical music in a vain attempt to calm down, more stress. Both camera-man and reporter were good-natured and informal; they did their best to put me at ease and make things enjoyable. Since things weren't as bad as I'd feared, I did relax enough to talk coherently, but not much more. I endured; I didn't have fun. I was really thankful for the opportunity, and if it presented itself I'd do it again. But I'm not planning a career in television.

It was difficult for me to do both interviews. I think the key to my actually going through with them is that I knew I had to. Not because my parents or anyone else was forcing me, but because I knew it was important and that it was a necessary step in the growth of my magazine. Also, I'd given my word. I had to keep it. When it comes down to doing something I'm shy or scared about, there's my criterion: is it necessary? (Necessary for whatever reason, be it really wanting to do something – which is a kind of necessity – or be it seeing the practicality of doing it.) It's a decision I have to make for myself; my parents can't make it for me in most cases. There's a kind of courage that comes from making your own choices and sticking by them. Maybe one day, I'll have collected enough courage to overcome all the shyness before it happens. But if not, at least I know how to deal with it.

Intimidated by Art Class

From Jessica Amas (HI):

One of the few activities I've been nervous about going to was my art class. Two years ago, my mom saw an ad in

the newspaper for children's art classes by a well-known local artist. I had missed the first class, but decided to start the second week.

The day of the class, I sat in the car not wanting to get out. I was intimidated because I knew the teacher was a professional artist and I didn't think that I was going to be as talented as her students. On the other hand, I liked art and had recently completed a summer art academy. I knew I was good at art, and part of me wanted to go to the class.

I got out of the car, and saw that the five kids in the class were all sitting on plastic chairs in front of easels. I sat down and listened while the teacher told us what to do. She taught us perspective drawing, and we drew her bookshelf. Once I began drawing, I was so immersed in my work that the time went quickly. Before I knew it, class was over, and I could have spent twice the amount of time there.

I continue to attend these art classes, and I look forward to them. I've learned so much. There are now other homeschoolers who attend the classes. It's a completely non-threatening environment.

My mom really encouraged me to go. I have learned over the years that she tries to know our interests and she follows up on them when she gets us involved in activities. My advice to others is to be open to trying new experiences; chances are you'll really enjoy them.

Imagining Embarrassing Scenarios

From Amber Boas (FL):

Being fearful and reluctant to participate in situations where I will have to interact with new people is very typical for me. My mother is constantly coming up with ideas and suggestions of activities involving that sort of situation, and although she very often has good ideas and suggests things that I would like to try, I have a lot of trouble expressing enough enthusiasm to convince her that I really want to be involved in whatever it is.

The reason for this is that whenever she tells me she's found a volunteering opportunity for me, a job I could apply for, a class I could take, a camp I could go to, or even sports I could join in, the first thing that happens to me is that I get a queasy sort of feeling just imagining myself in that situation. Then my mind starts running through various embarrassing or humiliating scenarios that could happen, and I become very skeptical, basically looking for reasons why I wouldn't like the experience or why I wouldn't be able to participate in it. But while all of that's going on, I'm also thinking about the good scenarios that might happen and about how much I know I need to experience these situations if I ever want to overcome my fear of them.

Unfortunately, fear overcomes interest almost every time, and I end up saying something hesitant and noncommital with just a vague amount of interest, like, "That *sounds* interesting" or "That *might* be fun." What I really feel I need to help me get over my initial anxiety is the motivation that comes from having someone tell me they want me to do something, instead of just suggesting that I might like to do it. However, my parents have never been dictatorial types and it's not always easy for them to insist I do something, especially when I look worried and upset by the prospect of doing it. They would much prefer that my siblings and I choose our own experiences and motivate ourselves to do them, but the reality is that if the decision to get involved in a situation I'm scared of is left up to me, I will most likely say "I don't know what I want to do" and will probably end up not doing anything at all.

I'm 18 now, so I'm on the verge of encountering this problem with more frequency as impending college decisions loom ahead and as I feel more of a need to encounter new people. I console myself with the knowledge, from past experiences, that the apprehension and anxiety I feel beforehand always goes away in the actual situation. And while I may still feel uncomfortable and awkward at times, the actual experience is never as bad as my anticipation of it.

Making the Transition to Ballet School

From Katie Williamson (KS):

About two years ago, I was preparing to leave home for a professional ballet/academic boarding school in Toronto, 1500 miles away from my rural home in Kansas. I was entering a whole new realm of life, and most of the time I was excited and intrigued, but I was also very nervous. I wasn't nervous about living so far away from home or about the rigorous ballet training. What scared me was the academic program. My past experience of academic schooling was – well, I guess I didn't have much. Whether it be bike riding, bird watching, painting, music making, or just daydreaming, I was taught that in everything I saw, heard, smelled, or touched, there was some new learning experience to be had, and it didn't have to be academic.

By the time I was 14, I had decided that I wanted something more than the freestyle life that was my childhood playtime. But I was scared that I was behind in academics compared to other kids my age – especially in

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math, in which I had always had tough "mind blocks." And so before I left for boarding school, I took some private math lessons with a good friend of mine who happened to be a math professor. I had a very good experience which prepared me for the months ahead.

My first term of school was hard, both physically and mentally. But as the year progressed, I became more accustomed to my new lifestyle. Earlier on, I had had nightmares that I would be flooded with questions like, "What's the square root of 81? Name all the provinces of Canada, what's the capital of the Northwest Territories," and so on. I spent hours looking at maps of Canada and studying anything else that I thought I might be asked during the first days of school. But I found out that my visions of school life were much different from the reality. As it turned out, the experience wasn't as scary as I'd thought. All of my new classmates were very helpful and understanding, and the teachers were just as nice and very human.

And so my fear of the "school environment" has changed considerably in the two years that I have attended this school. I also found out that I wasn't so far behind in my academics as I had thought. Sometimes I'll come upon something that everyone else has already learned, but I don't feel like I missed a lot not knowing it earlier. I just jump in and say, "Would you mind explaining?" and always people are glad to help.

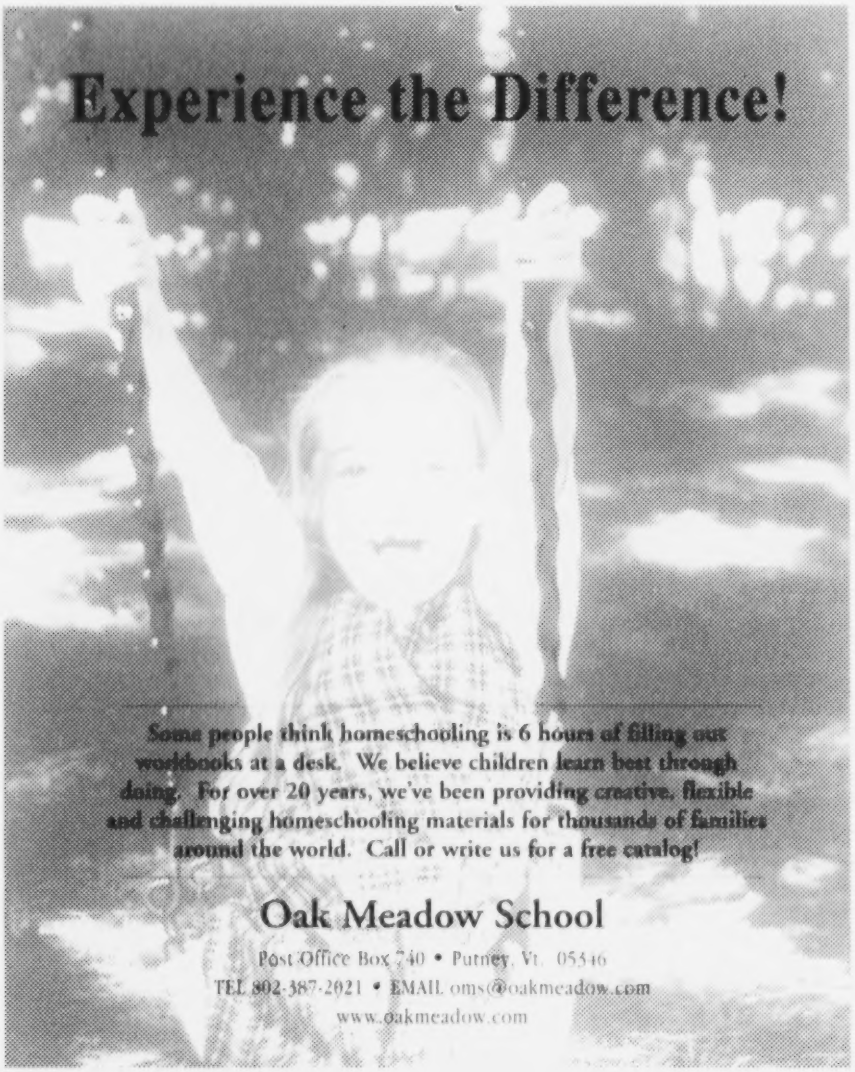
Fear of Working Hard for Spelling Bee

From Jeremy Young (AZ):

One of the things I'm best at academically is spelling. I competed in spelling bees last year, and, to my delight, I came in third in the state bee. I knew that this year there was a chance I could win, and I was very excited since the prize was a trip to Washington, DC and a chance to compete in the National Spelling Bee. However, I felt that I stood no chance of winning unless I did some heavy studying. I've not been the hardest worker generally, and the idea of working on any one thing for several hours a day was very scary to me. But I studied up to four hours a day for the last few months before the bee, and all the unpleasantness that I expected became instead a sort of "making myself" experience. I've now turned into a hard and dedicated worker about most things – and what's more, the studying paid off, because I won the state bee.

I had the same sort of experience when I was on a swim team a few years ago, but in reverse. I'm certainly not an innate swimmer; anything physical is not my specialty. What's more, the team I chose happened to be the most advanced in town. I was considered a flop in practice, and most of my friends were soon surpassing me. In short, I was trying to fit in where I did not belong.

I made myself fit in, though. In my first race, I was eighth out of eight and yards behind the rest. I was very disappointed, but though I had doubts if I would ever be anything but last, I kept swimming. I was glad I did. By the time I was sidelined with an injury last year, I had made it to sixth out of eight in a higher-level race and learned an important lesson: most hard things do pay off in the end, whether directly or indirectly. ◆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Homeschoolers in College— Yes, They're Different!

Her Challenge: Finding Time for Reflection and Contemplation

Rebecca Auerbach (CA) writes:

Last autumn, I began college. My only experience with the classroom structure had come from kindergarten and from the two college courses I had taken for high school credit. Did this leave me unprepared for college? Not at all. Unschooling prepared me to deal with college in the ways that concerned questioners usually mean – passing tests, doing homework, getting A's – and it also prepared me to go beyond such things. I did not approach college as a series of dull duties that I had to finish for the sake of credits and grades. I focused on (and took delight in) thorough, meaningful learning. That proved to be a lot to ask. The hectic pace of the college system discourages true learning and certainly discourages enjoyment of learning. In seeking meaningful and joyous education from this system, I have encountered great frustrations, a good many puzzled stares, and some lessons that have not been part of the assigned reading.

I attend the community college in my hometown and plan to transfer to a state college soon. I am not pursuing a degree; my major, to those who ask, is "classes that interest me." In my first semester, those were American Literature, Macro-economics, and Media in America. Three classes made for a nine-unit "part-time" schedule, which seemed practical since I worked part-time and was new to structured studying.

Unlike my traditionally schooled classmates, I was accustomed to being responsible for my own education and loving it. Most of my classmates behaved like indentured workers who had sold themselves into the college's service in exchange for diplomas. I saw myself as a customer who had made a business agreement: I paid tuition and implicitly agreed to do as my teachers instructed, and in return I got to attend and participate in classes and receive the teachers' help and attention. With this attitude, with my eager interest in the subjects, and with a lifelong habit of setting out to learn and understand whatever had significance to me, being a "good student" came naturally.

But being a good student was a side issue. I don't call my unschooling a success because it has produced a college student who can get A's, impress teachers, and complete homework on time. These schoolish achievements are the least of what I have accomplished in college. Last semester, I shouted Emerson's Divinity School Address from a mountaintop. I saw my relationship with my parents from a new perspective when the Econ teacher lectured on families as economic units. I read one of my Media in America books aloud to my mother. When the Literature teacher belittled Washington Irving, I gave an impassioned defense of his work and of the concept of lighthearted writing. I wrote an essay showing that Poe's "Ligeia" might be the daydream of a teenage boy. I read about the Hong Kong crisis in *The Wall Street Journal* and got the Econ prof to explain what I did not understand. My studies were not limited to what would be on an exam. They were a wild and joyful exploration.

Yet the course of true learning did not run smoothly that semester. The trouble was my so-called part-time course load. It proved to be not at all part time, and the word *load* felt more and more apt as the semester wore on. When I signed up for classes, I had not known how much time they would take. And even when I was told the number of hours, I couldn't guess how it would feel. I was not alarmed when, a week into the semester, I heard the standard rule of thumb: for a typical three hour a week course, an "A" student usually has to spend ten hours a week on homework. That amount of time didn't sound like a problem: it would mostly be reading, and hadn't I always loved to read?

But never before in my life had I had to read *too much*. I had often spent whole days reading, but only when it was right for me and never with a set number of pages to finish. So I never knew that interesting reading could be unpleasant.

For the first few weeks, all was as I expected. I read as eagerly as I ever had, and it was delightful to make reading the highest priority on every week's to-do list. In time, though, I glutted myself on books. I was ready to do other things for a while and to use my mind in other ways, but I didn't have the time or energy. And, most of all, I needed a chance to contemplate and celebrate what I had already learned. When I took a break, I most often spent it walking in the woods or just staring at the wall, thinking about my reading and my classes. I would relate them to my life and rejoice in what was beautiful to me. When I was working or riding in the car, these same thoughts occupied me. They were a delight, but they exhausted me as well. I had no name for what I was doing until I read Walt Whitman's "Beginning My Studies," which ends with these lines: "The first step I saw awed and pleas'd me so much,/I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any further,/But stop and loiter all the time to sing in ecstatic songs."

This is what I have always done with my studies. But college did not allow time for stopping and loitering, and so my ecstatic songs were limited to those few moments I could snatch before hastening on to the next assignment. It was wearing and

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frustrating. I began to count the days until the semester would be over.

I did not need to run myself ragged this way. I could have taken the approach of many of my fellow students. Often, one of them would say to me, "I read all the words, but I can't say I really understood much of it," and I would think of a line from John Holt's *How Children Fail:* "When you have acres of paper to fill up with pencil marks, you have no time to waste on the luxury of thinking." The same is true when you have acres of pages to read. If I had not kept wasting time on thinking, my assignments would not have taken me so long. Nor would I have felt a need to "sing it in ecstatic songs." But studies without thought and celebration are meaningless drudgery. Except on a few days when I was just too tired to care, I chose to stick with my old way of studying.

I had a month's vacation from that semester and the spring one, but it was not enough. I wanted more than a month to recuperate from the previous semester and to contemplate it, to marvel at what had "awed and pleas'd me" and to criticize what I had disliked. And, having devoted myself almost exclusively to college for 18 weeks, I wanted time for other things.

I decided to take a single class. Thus far, it has worked out splendidly. I am thoroughly understanding and appreciating my class, and I have plenty of time and energy left for other things – unassigned, deadline-free reading; experiments with short story writing, which I have never tried before; just sitting outside and watching the grass grow.

Did unschooling prepare me for college? Yes. It prepared me to find meaning and beauty in my studies. It prepared me to look critically at the college system and not make needless concessions to it. And it prepared me never to forget that there are other ways to learn.

His Challenge: Maintaining Enthusiasm

Fritz Herrick of New York writes:

I homeschooled myself for the last three years of high school, taking correspondence courses from a variety of schools and college courses at my local community college. Then I applied to several traditional private colleges. Several accepted me. With hope and pride, I chose the one most academically challenging.

Although college has been a great experience for me, if faced with the same choice again, I'm not so sure I would choose the most challenging college. As a homeschooler, I developed attitudes toward learning that differed from the attitudes I saw in most of the students around me. Learning was something I chose to do, not something I was forced to do. I looked for processes before I sat down to memorize a list of facts. I came to love the subjects I was studying enough to do extra work for them. These values made learning such a joy, and I hoped I would continue to love learning in college.

When I started college, I found that I could do very well at the academic work. The assignments were time-consuming, but they felt easy and the material was engaging. We read books I would have chosen to read in my free time, and we wrote about them in a way I enjoyed. I wanted to study and write, and my desire and time were all I needed to invest in order to do very well. I found myself reading unassigned chapters and writing more than the assigned papers. I visited the professors during their office hours to discuss the material, and was having a great time. I didn't do everything perfectly, but because I did more than what was assigned, my grades were very high. So far, so good.

This wasn't the case for those around me. At this point, I think the difference between me and many of my peers had to do with self-discipline. I was a veteran at dealing with freedom, whereas my peers had never experienced it. When they learned that there was no curfew, many of the guys I knew spent an awful lot of time drinking, partying, and goofing off while I studied. The professors seemed to be testing us on our responsible use of time, not on our knowledge. But after a few months, the parties got old, everybody calmed down, and people hit the books. When this happened,

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my grades started to go down. I read the same books as everyone else, and learned just as much as, if not more than, my fellow students. But more and more red marks appeared on my papers, and the differences between me and my peers came to the surface.

A lot of the students I know take pride in being able to memorize long lists of information. They have been doing it all their lives, and it is how many of them have done so well in high school. When I was in high school, I found all this memorizing tedious. So when I homeschooled, I found some new ways to learn. It's fun to read a history book for its stories, to try a scientific experiment in a textbook, and to watch a subtitled movie in a foreign language. I sought to understand the material, and the details came to me through exposure and logic rather than through memorization. My instructors at the correspondence schools respected this. But I don't think students in the classroom got this opportunity. They were graded on how well they had memorized the material, and their success was based on how well they regurgitated the facts instead of how well they understood the material. The college professors picked up where the high school teachers left off, and continue to reward memorization and regurgitation, it seemed to me.

I also came to see that learning is so discouraging to some students that they see it as work to be endured until the weekend rolls around. On Friday and Saturday nights, I want to continue learning: read a book for fun, attend a lecture, watch a foreign-language movie. But I'm in the minority. I find it sad that many of my peers dislike academic work so much that they are desperate to clear their minds of it on Friday. Many of them do this by drinking and partying all night. I may go to a party every now and then to dance or be with my friends, but I don't do it to *escape*, and often I go home to a book instead.

After a few years at college, I am beginning to understand the other students' disgruntlement, and to experience it myself. I chose a college that is so challenging that sometimes I am forced to resort to uninteresting and uninvigorating styles of learning

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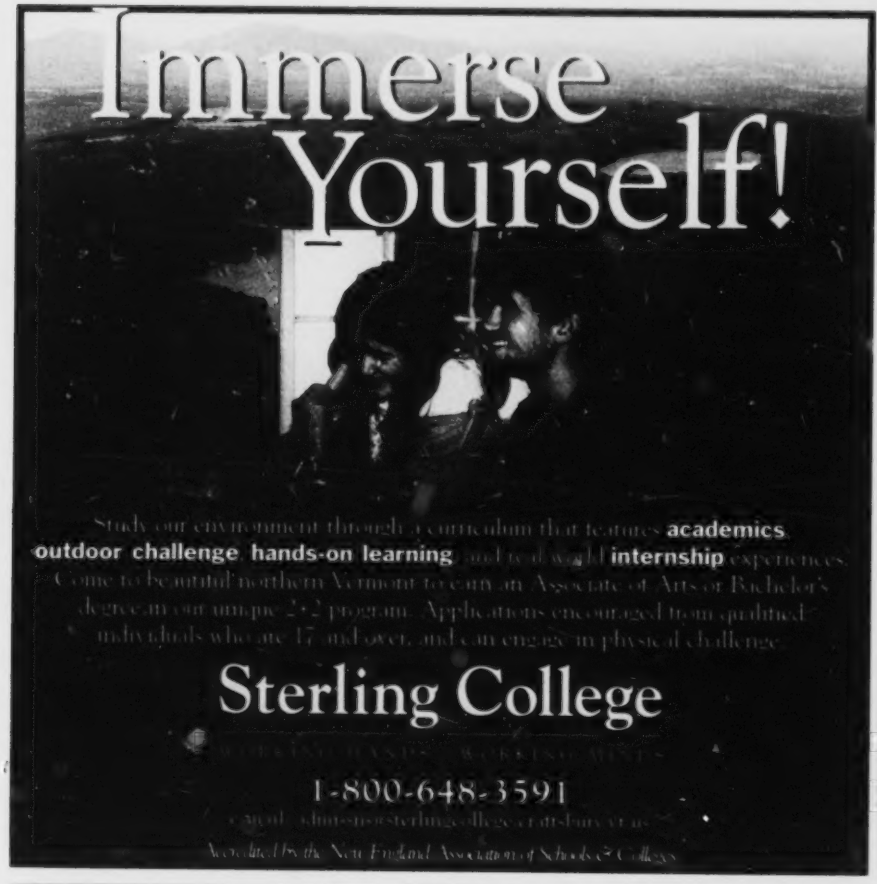

too. In order to keep my grades up, I memorize and regurgitate. This discourages me and makes schoolwork such a chore that I just want to get it over with. To keep up with the challenges of this school, I sometimes have to sacrifice the joy of learning that I experienced as a homeschooler.

Overall, college *has* been a great experience for me. But there are times when I think of a more ideal situation, one where I can do the required work very well and do even more than is required, because I want to. One where I can always learn in an exciting way. And one where a good number of people around me share these values. I now think that the best college may not always be the one that is the most academically challenging in the traditional sense, but rather the one in which the differences between one's own attitude toward learning and the attitudes of other students are not so great as to be an impediment. The best college may be the one in which a student can excel in joy and freedom.

Thoughts from an Admissions Officer

Marion Sikora writes:

Recently I was hired as the Admissions Counselor at Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, Vermont, my alma mater. Sterling College is a tiny liberal arts college with an environmental focus. Students study subjects such as wildlands ecology and management, sustainable agriculture, and outdoor education/leadership. At the same time, they gain hands-on experience on the college farm, managing the woodlot, and completing a series of adventure/challenge activities.

Before attending Sterling, I hadn't known much about the concepts behind homeschooling. As a student, I met two fellow students who had been homeschooled for at least some of their school years. Then, as I began to work here, I came into contact with an ever-increasing number of homeschooled students. A few years ago, my parents took my three brothers out of the public school system and began to teach them at home. Throughout my experiences at Sterling and at my parents' house, I am continually impressed by the quality of the students that come from a homeschooled background.

This year, five of the 62 members of our student body have been homeschooled for at least part of their educational careers. Sterling demands much from its students who must complete a rigorous academic schedule while at the same time working hands-on in various classes and chore rotations. Sterling students must be self-motivated and genuinely interested in what they are learning here. They also have to be open to a close-knit, family-oriented campus community. Our homeschooled students thrive in this atmosphere. They have discovered, through their home education, what their interests are, and have found that Sterling offers the program they want. Because of their personal stake in the program here, they are self-motivated and innovative learners, a vital part of the campus community both socially and academically.

For example, when spring break came last year, the campus emptied of students who were ready for a deserved break. One of the homeschooled students stayed on campus. The Farm Manager had become sick, and this homeschooled student ran the farm, doing twice-daily chores and frequent check-ups. She had come to Sterling with a strong interest in the rural community life here. Her attraction to the farm continues. Part of the core curriculum in the sophomore year at Sterling is a ten-week internship with an organization in the field of Resource Management. This student has completed an internship working with people in an agricultural education center. I might add that the organization she worked with spoke highly of her abilities.

Other homeschooled students take an active part in the community life at Sterling. They babysit faculty members' children, organize Student Life activities, and voluntarily help out in the Admissions Office, giving tours to visitors and making calls to prospective students. All this is in addition to

performing well academically. Mature and self-aware, the homeschooled students have grown up with a large part of the responsibility for their own education, and I can see that they bring that sense of personal responsibility with them to Sterling.

Our homeschooled students do run into problems, as well. I asked a couple of them what challenges they encountered as they moved to a more traditional educational system. Some homeschoolers arrive at Sterling having taken traditional tests and are not any more bothered by the stress of tests than publicly educated students. Others arrive with little experience taking tests, and they do struggle with the pressures of testing. But our community is small and support for any student is available if they ask.

Before my recent experiences with homeschooled students, I held a misconception that they were not as proficient at time-management skills as students who had come from a traditional educational background. I asked around and heard that this was not the case.

As I said, my younger brothers have also been homeschooling. When private school tuition moved up out of our price range and Mom grew very dissatisfied with the public schools in our area, Dad suggested that my two youngest brothers could be schooled at home. After a year, my mother took the eldest of my three brothers out as well, and it is he who has benefited the most obviously from homeschooling. He who used to rebel against everything in the world now often stays home by choice to be with the family. He has grown so much in the last two years; he is taking charge of his own life. He is pursuing the study of history, government, and wars in depth. Meanwhile, my youngest brother is building a house and tossing out words such as "timber-frame," "soffit," and "faccia." My middle brother loves the stars, space, and computers. As they grow, I am watching them develop the same qualities that I admire in the homeschoolers here at Sterling. I hold the deepest respect for the parents of homeschoolers. The homeschoolers I have seen have proven to me that the choice to homeschool is well worth the effort. ◆

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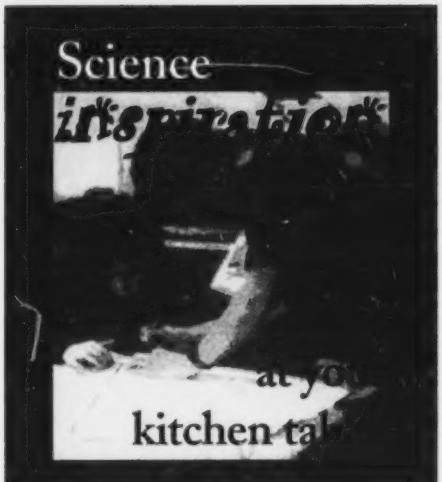

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Additions to Directory

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Issue #124
Sept./Oct. '98

GWS

Founded in 1977
by John Holt

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

A reader wrote to us, "While our family's beliefs are often contrary to the bulk of the letters and articles published in GWS, I enjoy reading your magazine. It helps me to understand different aspects of the homeschool movement and to be more tolerant and educated on different points of view." How heartening, I thought when I read this, that this reader is able to see difference as interesting rather than threatening, and that she's able to go beyond the comfort and familiarity of associating with like-minded people to find value in the words of people with whom she disagrees.

Dealing with difference in any form is a challenge for many people, and homeschooling families come up against this in so many ways: how to accommodate different perspectives within a support group? How to meet the needs of two very different siblings? How to assuage the fear that homeschooling children will later blame their parents for raising them outside the norm? How to handle feeling different from one's friends who send their kids to school?

While homeschooling parents are struggling with these kinds of questions, young people struggle with their own questions of difference. One is the task of building friendships across differences of one kind or another. Periodically we like to ask our young readers what socialization means to *them*, and back in GWS #88, Ginny Hood wrote, "Socialization means dealing with people who aren't exactly like you." With that definition, we realize that true socialization is a challenge not just for kids but for all of us.

For this issue's Focus, we asked young readers to tell about a friendship with someone whose life or background or beliefs were different in at least one significant way. We were particularly interested in how that difference feels and whether it was important to the friends to talk about it.

Sara, a grown homeschooler, says of the friends she meets at college, "As long as we can talk openly," it's OK to have different views, and that seems to be the watchword for many. When I read about Hannah staying up late into the night to talk with her friend about their different experiences, or Margaret's description of taking walks with her friend and tossing tough questions back and forth, I'm impressed with how these young people aren't shying away from big conversations. Now I wonder what happens, or what could happen, when adults and young people talk together about the challenge of dealing with difference. Instead of thinking of socialization only as something kids need to learn how to do, adults can talk to kids about their own experiences being friends with people who aren't exactly like them. What do they talk about? What's off limits? When is difference enlightening, as it was for the reader who sent us that note, and when is it frightening? From such honest and mutual exploration of these issues, adults and young people can learn a lot from each other.

– Susannah Sheffer

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News & Reports

Homeschooling in Egypt

Dawna Peterson writes from Egypt:

We came to Egypt as homeschoolers, having educated our children at home in Maryland for the previous three years. In Maryland we benefited from a large and diverse network of other homelearning families and from community resources. Arriving in Egypt, we immediately set about trying to construct similar support structures here in Cairo. Currently The Ma'adi Homelearning Network is twelve families strong and growing.

The poor of Egypt have educated their children at home since time immemorial. For the most part this education consists of learning the skills they will need to survive in a difficult urban environment, skills which may or may not include reading, writing and arithmetic. There is "free" public schooling in Cairo, but it is not really free. Parents must pay for uniforms, books, and supplies that are priced out of the reach of the poor and even many of the working class. Upper class families send their kids to private schools taught in English, French or German. These schools are extremely rigid, being aimed at teaching children to pass a series of national standardized tests that will ultimately determine whether or not they go to a university.

Ma'adi, where we live, is a suburb of Cairo. It houses a large segment of the foreign community in Egypt (embassy staff, oil industry workers, academics and so forth) especially those with children. Most families send their children to the Cairo American College, an American school teaching elementary, middle and high school grades.

There are no public libraries, pools, or community centers. Since we do not use a packaged curriculum, access to a library was critical to our homeschooling. Fortunately, we were able to purchase a "non-affiliate" pass to the Cairo American College. This has enabled us to use the library and the playground. Our children also participate in Girl Scouts and community sports leagues.

When I began locating other homelearners, I found that expatriates ("expats") have been home educating here for years. Homelearning families report similar issues with schools here as in the U.S: rigid curricula, authoritarian settings, and moral failure with the middle and high schools. The community here is highly transient and four years seems to be the average time any one family is here. Thus, there isn't a lot of consistency within the community.

When we arrived there wasn't a formal homeschooling network yet established. I began encouraging formal meetings, sharing resources, and taking field trips. Thus, we are growing. This past year we toured a farm, a chocolate factory, and a living history museum. In the coming year we are planning a world geography fair, a science fair, and math olympics.

It is easy to condemn communities like Ma'adi as "foreign ghettos," alienated from the society that hosts them. No doubt there is some truth to this. But by being part of the expat community, our children haven't felt as uprooted as they otherwise might. And through travel we are able to "live and learn" in an extremely tangible way. We have had the experience of studying Egyptian history and then visiting the sites described in our books: the Giza Pyramids, Tutankhamen's "stuff" in the Cairo museum, the Valley of the Kings and Queens in Luxor, ancient Temples in Luxor and Aswan. We have sailed the Nile in a felucca and ridden horses and camels through the desert. We're studying Egyptian Arabic and establishing contacts with locals. In this gradual way the children are experiencing another culture and broadening their perspectives of how others live.

Having homeschooled for three years in the U.S., I am aware that most homeschoolers have to deal with authorities. We don't have anyone we need to report to. Homelearning is legal here. In fact, we have one native Egyptian homelearning family in our group. They realize that because they are homeschooling, the kids will probably not be eligible for the tests that would enable them to get into the free national universities that are the ticket to the professions in Egypt. They plan to send their children either to the American University in Cairo or to apply to universities abroad.

Local working-class Egyptians ask us frequently why our children aren't in school. They seem puzzled or amused that we, as "elites," are choosing to homeschool, when they do so out of necessity. The ex-pat community finds us as puzzling as many Americans did in the U.S. There seems to be a mistaken belief that children at home would be in the way and take huge amounts of time to entertain. Our oldest daughter is a homelearning proponent and frequently tries to convert her friends into homeschoolers. She was successful with two families in the U.S and it appears she has convinced another family here to start homelearning this coming year. Her goal, she tells us, is to have all her friends homeschooled so they are available for playdates.

There are many difficulties facing homeschooling families in Cairo. Resources that we take for granted in the U.S. aren't here, or are available only for a considerable expense. Materials imported from abroad are subject to high duties, sometimes tripling the price. Nonetheless, homeschooling continues to grow. Decisions by many companies and institutions to pay for the schooling of

only two of their employees' children, and limitations of educational options by foreign employers (such as a recent U.S. State Department rule that it will only pay for children to attend the Cairo American College, regardless of parental or student preferences), make homeschooling an increasingly attractive option for many families.

College Admissions Personnel on Homeschooling

Irene M. Prue, Assistant Director of Admission at Georgia Southern University, has produced a research report called "A Nationwide Survey of Admission Personnel's Knowledge, Attitudes, and Experiences with Home-Schooled Applicants." Copies of the full report are available for $6.95 from the National Association for College Admission Counseling, 1631 Prince St, Alexandria VA 22314-2828. Here's an excerpt:

Perhaps the greatest issue of concern to admission personnel was documentation – objective measures of a student's knowledge and ability. Providing detailed documentation regarding previous course work can assist admission personnel in evaluating home-schooled applicants' probability of success at a given institution. Utilizing recognized evaluation instruments such as the Advanced Placement Exams and the SAT II subject area tests when students complete the content as part of their home-school curriculum is a viable option. ...

Home-school leaders and families must also keep in mind the role of admission personnel. The job of admission personnel is to identify and recruit students who will succeed at their institution. So providing objective measures of evaluation of home-schooled students is critical for admission personnel to carry out their responsibilities. This study clearly indicated that admission personnel are not anti-home-schooling; they simply need concrete measures to assess the chances that a home-schooled applicant will succeed at their institution.

Many institutions are developing admission policies to address home-schooled applicants. But how these policies are being developed and what information is being used to develop admission criteria for home-schooled applicants is still unclear and is an area for further study. Clearly, there is potential for admission personnel and home-school organizations to collaborate in the development of standardized mechanisms for documentation that could facilitate the application process. Leaders in the home-school movement should approach college admission directors or vice presidents to begin this work because, as this study revealed, these administrators have the most favorable attitudes toward home-schooling and they have had more positive experiences with home-schooled students than other respondents (i.e. counselors, associate directors, and assistant directors). Unlike research at the elementary and secondary levels ..., which indicated that educational professionals had unfavorable attitudes toward home-schooling, personnel in higher education exhibited in this study relatively favorable attitudes toward home-schooling. This lack of hostility bodes well for the development of policy that meets the needs of all interested parties. ...

New Books of Interest

[SS:] Several of this season's new books will be of interest to GWS readers. A couple of the books described here are already in our John Holt's Book and Music Store catalog; others might be added in the future, so check with us if you're interested.

The Book of Learning and Forgetting, by Frank Smith. Fans of Frank Smith's work know that his ideas about learning closely resemble John Holt's and provide support and background understanding for many homeschooling families. This new book contrasts the "official" theory of learning – that learning is hard and tedious – with the "classic" theory that we learn all the time, from everything we do. Though Smith knows that the official theory dominates most schools and educational systems, he's tireless about believing that that domination doesn't have to persist forever. His final chapters are titled "Liberating Our Own Learning" and "Liberating Schools and Education." He also answers questions like "Don't some things have to be learned by rote?" and "When is it appropriate to correct children's mistakes?" (Teachers College Press, $17.95)

Dialogues, edited by Jerry Brown. Several GWS readers wrote to tell us they'd heard Jerry Brown's "We the People" radio program when I (Susannah Sheffer) was a guest on it in February 1997. It was one of the most in-depth interviews I've had a chance to do, covering not just homeschooling but the purposes of schooling and other aspects of John Holt's work. Now the text of that interview is included in this collection of 18 of Brown's interviews. Interviewees include Jonathan Kozol, Ivan Illich, Alice Walker, Sister Helen Prejean, Thich Nhat Hanh, Gary Snyder, John Gatto, and others. (Berkeley Hills Books, $12.95)

The Homeschooling Book of Answers, by Linda Dobson. Linda Dobson asked experienced parents, kids, advocates, and writers to answer a huge variety of questions about home-schooling, making this book a comprehensive and personal introduction to the topic. It seems useful mostly for people considering homeschooling or just starting out and – this especially is likely to appeal to GWS readers – for all those friends and relatives who have exactly the questions listed in the book. The questions range from "Should I do anything special for a child who is coming out of public school after years of attendance?" to "But what about the prom?" to "How do I schedule and organize our days?" to "How can I do my *own* assessment of where my child stands academically in relation to her peers?" There are 88 questions in all, and usually more than one contributor's answer (and the answers don't always agree). Contributors include David & Micki Colfax, Susan Evans, John Gatto, Nancy and Billy Greer, Mary Griffith, Mark & Helen Hegener, Cafi Cohen, Larry, Susan, and Megan Kaseman, Patricia Lines, Pat Montgomery, Donna Nichols-White, Becky Rupp, Susannah

Sheffer – and several others. (Prima Publishing, $16.95)

The Question is College: On Finding and Doing Work You Love, by Herbert Kohl. This book was listed in our spring catalog, but because it was delayed at the publisher's for a few months, we want to make sure our readers know that it is now available. The book was much loved by homeschoolers (and many others) when it first came out in 1989, and we're thrilled that it's now back in print with a new preface by the author. It's for teenagers who aren't sure that they want to go to college at all, and for their parents (especially those who may be worried about the no-college choice). As the subtitle suggests, it's also about finding work you love, which makes it a good companion to Michael Fogler's *Un-Jobbing* (see interview, this issue). (Heinemann-Boynton/Cook, $15.95. Now avail. from Holt Associates; add $4.90 s/h.)

The Unschooling Handbook, by Mary Griffith. Mary, whose earlier book was *The Homeschooling Handbook*, has written another book specifically about unschooling, and the subtitle is "How to Use the Whole World as Your Classroom." Although I'm still concerned (as I described in GWS #122) about the consequences of suggesting that unschooling and homeschooling are distinct and separate movements and practices, there's much in this book to appeal to parents new to the idea of learning without a formal curriculum. Some chapter titles are "TV or not TV," "How Can You Tell They're Learning?", "Changes as Kids Grow Older," and "Coping with Doubts and Challenges." The book's many examples show how young people can learn through real-life experiences, but Mary also makes clear right away that unschooling is distinguished not so much by its activities as by the attitude of the learner. "Unschooling puts the learner in charge," she concludes after showing that a school student and an unschooler could both be sitting at a table working on geometry problems, but they'd have very different reasons for doing it and a different approach to the task. (Prima Publishing, $15.95)

We've created a flyer designed to interest people in subscribing to GWS. One side announces the highlights of the forthcoming issue and tells readers that if they subscribe by such-and-such a date, their subscription will begin with that issue. The other side describes the magazine in general and the features that are in every issue.

We would like to ask for your help in getting this flyer into the hands of people who are likely to take an interest in it.

If you

- come into contact with homeschoolers (or prospective homeschoolers) regularly, though a support group, resource center, or other activities
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- have contacts with other groups that may be interested in GWS (La Leche League, other groups of parents, etc.), or
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and would like to receive a bunch of flyers every two months, please send us your name and address. This is a simple way that readers around the country can help us reach people we wouldn't otherwise reach. THANKS in advance.

Finally, if your copy of **The Teenage Liberation Handbook** is dog-eared or perpetually on loan to a friend, it's worth getting a copy of the recently released new edition, which contains lots of updated information (including information about homeschooling abroad), many new examples, and, in some cases, Grace Llewellyn's latest thoughts. ($19 + $4.90 s/h from Holt Associates).

Office News

Since our last issue went to press, Pat Farenga has spoken at the Florida Parent-Educators Association conference in Florida, the Link Homeschooling Conference in California, and the New Jersey Unschoolers Network conference, meeting a lot of GWS readers and friends. Meanwhile, we're gearing up for our own conference in September, and hope to see many of you there.

As we said in our last issue, we've been in the midst of reorganizing our shipping department, so that an outsourcing company in Michigan can take over the fulfillment of book orders and subscriptions. We appreciate our customers' patience with the delays that this transition caused during the latter part of June. By the time you receive this issue, things should be running smoothly.

We also appreciate how many of you took the time to fill out the survey that was printed in GWS #122. Not only did you give us useful information for advertisers, but several of you added additional comments for which we are most grateful. Those who filled out the survey received a free issue of GWS, and some of you asked us to donate that cost to our gift subscription fund instead, which we *also* appreciate. We continue to get more requests for subscriptions from low-income families than our gift subscription fund can cover, so any further donations to that fund are welcome.

Calendar

Sept. 14-18: 9th Annual Oregon Unschooling Chautauqua near Cascade Head, **Lincoln City, OR.** For info: SASE to Oregon Chautauqua, c/o Kim Gordon, 5125 SW Macadam Av, Suite 200, Portland OR 97201 or send email to ann@outoftheboxpublishing.com

Sept. 25-27: Growing Without Schooling annual conference in **Great Barrington, MA**. For details, see the back cover of this issue of GWS, or call us at 617-864-3100.

Sept. 26: West Virginia Home Educators Assoc. annual conference near **Jane Lew, WV**. For info: Mary Beth Stenger, 1-800-736-WVHE.

Oct. 23-25: Kentucky Independent Learners Network Fall Gathering and Mini-Conference at Stillwaters Campground in **Frankfort, KY.** Camping, canoeing, adults' and children's workshops. For more info: SASE to KILN Campout, 615 Indian Gap Rd, Frankfort KY 40601, or email JanNorgate@aol.com ◆

Homeschoolers and Technology: A Closer Look

Don't Make School's Mistakes

Loretta Heuer, who will be leading a workshop at our 1998 conference on How Homeschoolers Use Technology, writes:

How does our unschooling family use technology differently from schools?

• We use the plural form of the word: technologies.

Technology for learning isn't limited to computer software, nor even the computer itself with its e-mail, interactive services and Internet access. The word *technologies* reminds us of the wide range of resources available: films seen in theaters, videos watched at home, TV shows (viewed either in real time or more conveniently scheduled using the VCR), fax machines, photographs, video conferencing, recordings of music and the spoken word, printers and copiers, pagers and cell phones. It is also helpful to remember that once upon a time the written word was emerging technology.

Schools tend to block free-wheeling collaborative exploration, either from fear of what students will discover or fear that students will be overwhelmed and overstimulated.

• We avoid most software touted as "educational."

We use technologies in education, not educational technology. This is typical of most unschoolers who have a non-textbook approach to learning. For me, software designed to have "educational value" often seems contrived, tacky and artificial. Instead, we use the Internet to view a virtual dissection of a frog, read the daily Italian newspaper, investigate knot theory for algebra. Since none of these are found in textbooks, the Internet is fast becoming our text. I know that other homeschooling families are beginning to explore distance learning opportunities such as on-line courses and chats with professors and professionals. I imagine video conferencing with mentors will be the next step.

• We use technologies for learning rather than teaching.

Whereas schools tend to use technology as an add-on to supplement the way teachers teach, we use it to change the way we learn. The roles of student and teacher are fluid in our family. Because of this, my children and I tend to be co-learners, not just learning things none of us knew before, but also discovering things we didn't even know existed. (Do you know what's on Archimedes' tombstone? Or how contemporary artists depict Dante's *Inferno*?) This type of free-wheeling collaborative exploration is something that schools tend to block, either from fear of what students will discover or fear that students will be overwhelmed and overstimulated by the enormous amount of information in cyberspace.

• We use virtual tools for real, not simulated, tasks.

We use real software to do real tasks. We send e-mail, access and download resource materials, write letters, play problem solving games such as Myst, draw, participate in a poetry writers' group, collaborate on a statewide newsletter, obtain reference information for family travel, manage financial and quantitative data, download lyrics for songs we'd like to learn, even order books from our local library through their on-line card catalog. Most of these tasks would not be permitted on a school computer.

Furthermore, technology is available in our home, on demand, when we need it, twenty-four hours a day. We needn't wait until the classroom computer is free or until it's our turn to go down to the computer lab. For us, technology is as accessible as pencils and pens.

• We exploit technology's non-linear aspects.

We like not knowing where our Internet searches will lead us! The serendipitous result of following weird links usually provides us with knowledge and insights we never would have encountered had we followed a traditional outline. The Internet suits our synthetic, non-linear approach to learning. Technology has also taught us not to treat the printed word as sacred. Why not see three versions of *Richard III* on video first, and then read the text? In short, we are using technology to help construct a personalized education.

• We use emerging technologies to communicate rather than isolate ourselves.

While some feel that technologies impede communication (OK, call-waiting is atrocious), our family's communication has been enhanced by them. Quite frankly, without e-mail access I feel as isolated as if the phone were out of order. I'd be lacking a tool by which I share, talk, commiserate, empathize .... communicate.

Our sons have used a variety of technologies to connect with others: fax, e-mail, IM's (instant messages), chat rooms and audio tapes mailed to friends. Content ranges from the frivolous ("You've been sent a bouquet of virtual flowers!") to the deep social issues that concern them. I've found that kids are amazingly comfortable

sharing technology resources with each other. My younger son designed his web page by gathering information from on-line friends, most of whom he has never met in person. And as the parent of a college student, I've found that computer-facilitated communication has allowed my son and me to talk reflectively, download and forward research, edit each other's writing, and share a :-D (an email chuckle) or two.

As a homeschooler I've found recent computer technology to be a powerful resource. Eight years ago I could log on to Prodigy and read the day's few homeschool postings in less than half an hour. Today on America Online, where the total homeschool postings number in the tens of thousands, catching up on even one day's material is a virtual (pun intended) impossibility. However, with folders for just about every homeschool concern and subgroup, one can quickly find just the support needed.

We homeschoolers can often feel isolated in our geographic communities. Technology helps us connect with like-minded souls, regardless of locale, so we can feel less alone and more confident. We can quickly get information about state regulations, find strategies for interacting with in-laws, preview a variety of instructional materials, and join heated debates about such things as school-at-home and radical unschooling. With technology as a resource, the novice soon begins to feel that homeschooling is a manageable endeavor.

• We view technologies and their use as a complex phenomenon, neither Utopian nor inherently evil.

Our family is relatively unafraid of technologies; we enjoy experimenting with them. Whereas schools find it necessary to impose filters on technology, we simply take personal responsibility for its use. As such, my children aren't constrained by the formal curriculum of a computer course or a keyboarding course or an Internet course! We also aren't limited by some expert's definition of "age-appropriate learning," or what we need to know, or what's OK to see.

While I hope that the schooled children of the 21st Century will have access to independent, interdependent, interactive, impromptu learning, it is reassuring to know that we homeschoolers are free to develop a comfortable relationship with technology right now.

Homeschoolers Online? Not So Fast!

The following essay is written by Matt Hern, who works at Windsor House (a public free school in Vancouver) and edited the book collection Deschooling Our Lives, *and Stu Chaulk, who runs a small Internet consulting business and runs the on-line Netizen Activist Resource Center.*

Over the past several years, every homeschooling or alternative education publication seems to have been obliged to carry regular pieces extolling the virtues and pleasures of the Internet. The articles are always in a

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similar vein, starry-eyed at the volume of information and ease of access on-line, and trumpeting the possibilities for homeschoolers. It is now popularly assumed that every classroom, every living room, every office, and every library must have net access if they have any hope of staying current. Parents are now widely considered lax if they have not found some way to provide their children with PC's and modems, and proponents urge home-learners to get on-line as much as possible.

The public is eagerly lapping up every bit of Internet salesmanship that comes their way, and surprisingly, the homeschooling movement appears to have fallen right in line. We believe that this current of shameless enthusiasm threatens to undermine some of the best intentions of the homeschooling movement and runs directly counter to the socially transformative potential of school resistance. Frankly, we find the rush to virtuality disturbing and disappointing and want to encourage all homeschoolers to consciously restrict their cyber-lives and invest themselves in their families and communities instead.

Enthusiasm for the Internet threatens to undermine some of the best intentions of the homeschooling movement and runs directly counter to the socially transformative potential of school resistance.

There is no question that the net is useful in some specific ways, but to suggest that the Internet can or should become an essential part of everyday life is chimeric at best and profoundly disabling at worst. The power of on-line communication is rooted in its promise to erradicate time and space: over the net it is possible to send vast amounts of information instantly, to access documents a continent away, to correspond effortlessly, to surf and chat anywhere and to exit anytime. By its very definition, the Internet is a faceless and placeless landscape, importantly without root in any geographical place. The net is most critically about transcending the boundaries of locality, about going anywhere anytime, and in this it poses its most serious perils.

Refusing compulsory schooling is a wonderful and liberatory decision, but one that in our experience is too often rooted in individualist opportunism: an "I'm-gonna-get-what's-best-for-me-and-my-family" stance that relegates social concerns to a place far behind personal interests. The best parts of the unschooling movements are those that harbinge larger community transformations, that begin to draw communities and families together to shape and build their own lives rather than have bureaucracies and professionals do it for them. The power of the Internet is that it transcends local boundaries and draws kids and families into a virtual world beyond local relationships and lived reciprocities. The rise of the net necessarily means a loss of community.

The Internet is an amazing technology, to be sure, but there is nothing fantastical about the decline of community and mutual aid. The net's cheerleaders may hallucinate real people inside of a faceless placeless screen, but when they need friends to clean up garbage, help take care of children, go for a walk, or play football with, the virtual life comes up hollow. The answer to many simple queries may be available on-line in seconds, but when real friendship is needed, the screen cannot produce it. New technologies always replace something, and in the void virtuality leaves behind it, chances to nourish human connectedness and real community are always lost.

The parallels between the rise of the automobile, the growth of TV culture, and the emergence of the Internet are hard to ignore. Like the television and the private car, the Internet is a technology our culture is seemingly unwilling or unable to control. Instead of augmenting and complimenting the best parts of our lives, the technology spins out of control, and begins to take over culture itself. Television and cars are hardly just *pieces* of this culture; they dominate and control cultural and social life, like the net now threatens to do as well. As Ivan Illich put it nearly 25 years ago speaking of cars:

"Motorways expand, driving wedges between neighbors and removing fields beyond the distance a farmer can walk. Ambulances take clinics beyond the few miles a sick child can be carried. The doctor will no longer come to the house, because vehicles have made the hospital into the right place to be sick. Once heavy lorries reach a village high in the Andes, part of the local market disappears. Later, when the high school arrives at the plaza along with the paved highway, more and more of the young

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people move to the city, until not one family is left which does not long for a reunion with someone hundreds of miles away, down the coast."

The limitations and dangers of the automobile are only now being truly felt, and yet we careen along, largely unable to relax our grip on the wheel. The lessons and dangers in this current climate of infatuation with the Internet should be clear.

As the net becomes more and more pervasive, kids stop playing games like Dungeons and Dragons with one another; they now bury themselves in MUD's. Teenagers stop playing hockey in the street; they now play Nintendo. People stop going to libraries; instead they search the net. Friends stop writing letters; they e-mail. A young man no longer considers going next door to ask about recipes, a son stops calling his mother to ask how long bread should be allowed to rise. Families stop reading the Sunday comics together over breakfast because the paper is delivered electronically. Inevitably, we are moved further and further from one another and the distance between individuals is so great that the only solutions to the solitude will be on-line.

In the face of continuing ecological catastrophe and social degradation, the answers to our deepest concerns have to be found in the restoration of local communities. A genuinely democratic culture requires strong local places, communities people can participate in and care for with a sense of love and loyalty, full of humanly scaled institutions and economies. It is these local places that the Internet degrades and attempts to replace, substituting speed and clean efficiency for the time-consuming relationships that real community requires.

While the homeschooling movement seems oddly susceptible to the cheap charms of the net, it is also especially capable of renouncing virtuality. We believe that those who are resisting schools and schooling are posing themselves in direct opposition to a largely insane and debilitating culture, but that resistance is undermined when homelearning families root themselves in selfishness and insularity. Put more clearly, refusing schooling is so important because it can be a social refusal. Homelearning becomes a yuppified and largely irrelevant event when families seek only their own protection from schools and fail to address the social trap of schooling which ensnares us all. Staying home from school has to enhance and support community, not just individuals, lest it become merely another elite privilege.

Delving deeply into the Internet is just that: an insularity from the real world of social relationships and realities that undermines the best potential of deschooling. If homelearning is ever truly to pose itself as an alternative to schooling, we must be ready to search for common ground and for community at every turn. The Internet is a cheap facade of community that threatens to replace the very relationships that make real community possible and worthwhile. We urge homeschoolers to consider the role virtuality has in their lives and consider what it replaces. ◆

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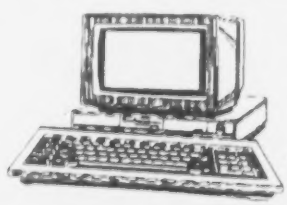

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Challenges & Concerns

Help for Struggling Readers

These writers are responding to Debbie Westheimer's "Unhappy About Her Reading Ability" in GWS #122.

From Rebecca Chapman of Texas:

If reading delay is simply a matter of timing, maturity, or learning style, then I agree parents should just be calm and patient. However, if there is an organic problem, I believe it is worth being more proactive, giving the child coping skills and strategies.

My son was diagnosed by three independent doctors as having convergence insufficiency – the lack of coordination between his two eyes. His neurons also did not communicate input clearly from the eyes to the brain. Not only did he reverse words and letters, and alternately skip and repeat lines of print, but the letters would blur, double, and wander around the page. He would feel seasick just looking at a book! Two years later, he was evaluated by two different doctors and a reading specialist. They found no sign of the convergence insufficiency, although the reading specialist could see signs that he *had* had it. Let me share some approaches that we took.

1. Prisms can be added to one lens of the child's glasses, training the eyes to work together. Ask a good eye doctor about these. They are ground into the lens and the glasses look like any other.

2. The eye exercises the doctor gave us were of limited help, but we found piano lessons to be wonderful help in eye-tracking practice, as well as being a real, not contrived, pursuit. There is evidence that piano study aids in brain development, and it certainly seemed to work in our case. Great output is not the goal; be process-oriented.

3. We found that martial arts, gymnastics, ballet, and tennis can also develop neural pathways.

4. Read with a bookmark under each line of print to track the correct line. The bookmark held just above the line helps train the eyes to look up and is a good strategy. It's worth a try, but my son found it confusing at times.

5. Some kids are light sensitive. They are helped by having softer light in the room, wearing a hat to block the light overhead, and copying a page of reading material onto blue or other pastel-colored paper. The Irlen Perceptual Development Corporation (310-496-2550) utilizes colored overlays which look like colored sheets from an overhead projector. Blue-grey and rose colors are most commonly useful. They block a lot of the information overload and cut down on the doubling of the letters.

6. A lot of print is just too small for kids to focus on. Enlarge the page with a photocopier, type it in a larger font, or get a large-print edition. *Reader's Digest* comes in a large-print edition, and it also features two-column pages, which are easier to track. I have my son read a large-print, two-column edition of the Scriptures daily, which is easy to focus on and track. He already knows the story, too, which helps comprehension.

7. The CD-ROM Ultimate Speed Reader (Davidson) has some great eye exercises. It emphasizes reading in word clusters rather than just one word at a time.

8. Prayer works.

9. *Max the Cat Phonics Practice Readers* from Modern Curriculum Press (800-321-3106) is great for very beginning readers to learn decoding with a real story. *Explode the Code* from Educators' Publishing Service (800-435-7728) is good at developing specific reading skills.

10. Some might not feel comfortable doing this, but we gave our son a small dose of seasickness medication, meclizine. Since he feels seasick when he looks at a page, the medicine seemed to help him process the information more efficiently.

11. Cuddle your child. There is increasing evidence that children cannot learn when they are stressed or feel unloved. Some children are very tactile and cannot learn unless they are being touched. When my son was small he always sat on my lap to read, and was absolutely unable to make out anything at all otherwise. Sometimes he would sling a leg across my lap, or sit upside down close by me, or lean the book on me.

Parents can do what no formal teacher is allowed to do, and that may be the key issue for a child. The first year I homeschooled my son, he was in third grade and had a lot of excess baggage from his school experiences. He used to cry hysterically, and with little immediate provocation, over past hurts, almost on a daily basis. His reading was a big issue. One day he simply refused to read. I held him close for a long time to calm him. When he was very calm, we read *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, alternating one word at a time between us, in a soft voice, for about a paragraph. Then I read him more of the story. The next day we alternated words, then sentences. Soon we could alternate paragraphs, then pages. For years, he could only read when he was in a big bear hug. Now that he is older, I still draw with my finger on his arm or on his back while he reads.

As you can see, we threw a lot of things at this. He is now in sixth grade, reading above grade level, for what that's worth, and reading regular print *Star Wars* books with zest.

From Julie Scandora (WA):

My son's experience with learning to read was similar to Debbie Westheimer's daughter's. He also was unhappy with his inability to read, but felt incapable of changing the situation. Even though Ty was 8, several

years younger than Debbie's daughter, he still felt behind his friends and others his age. He was well aware that most schooled children know how to read by 8 and he could not. And he had no idea how to learn. He knew the basics for starting: the letters of the alphabet and the sounds associated with most of them. He could recognize a few short words that he had written many times. But he could not put it all together.

As time went on, I saw Ty's self-esteem for reading degenerate. Success in other areas of his life were irrelevant to him. The fact was that he could not read. He was getting older and there seemed no solution in sight.

This was a turning point for me. Until then I had believed that with time and the proper environment, he would naturally learn on his own. It is possible that this would have been the case with Ty. But I felt that it would be unlikely, because it was as if with each passing day, another brick was being added to the wall in his mind that separated him from reading mastery. If I continued to wait, soon that mental wall would be insurmountable. Nor could my words make any difference. Confidence would come only through mastery.

The only solution I saw at this point was to teach him. He was not willing, so, yes, I forced the lessons on him. I believe he was afraid of failure by this point and did not want to chance it. Indeed, the first few lessons were not fun for either of us. It took us half an hour to read/sound out about 16 words. I am sure that after that first lesson, Ty did not feel that reading was anywhere in sight. If anything, he was confirmed in his belief that reading was very difficult.

But the worst was behind us. Subsequent lessons were either shorter or covered more ground. We often reread for one lesson what he had read the previous time. This allowed Ty to see the progress he was making as the second reading naturally went better than the first.

We spent an incredibly short time on all of the lessons. They averaged 15 minutes a day and we did them only about three days a week for about two months. That was about eight hours total. By the time we stopped, Ty was by no means a fluent reader. But he had broken the code, he knew how the pieces fit together, and he could continue on his own. So I let him. Over the following months, I got glimpses that he was continuing to make sense of the written words around him. (I did not test him; these instances arose naturally, initiated by him.) I remember the day we were on a walk a few months after the lessons had ceased. He saw a sign and read "Food Store." I was impressed because in our lessons we had never covered the double "o" sound, let alone those two words. Yet he had read them with ease.

I believe that it can be hard to have self-confidence about something without having direct evidence of one's skill in that particular task. It is not enough to say, "Well, I learned how to do such-and-such, so of course I'll learn to read when I am ready and really want to." Sometimes the child is ready and does want to learn, but it is not happening. Each day gives support for further self-doubt. Sometimes a guide can do wonders.

From Shoshana Socher (Israel):

One of our daughters learned to read at 9 and now, at 9 1/2, is reading quite fluently. Our experience taught us that "simply" breaking the code is not possible for all children. Reading, for our daughter, was an unbreakable code for a long time. Happily, her siblings and friends didn't make an issue of it, and I think that helped her self-esteem.

I would caution against pushing reading at a young age because one thing we have noticed closely parallels anthropology: children's pre-literate culture or personality slips away after they learn to read. For instance, before you can read, you memorize a lot of things. Not just rote memorization, but things you truly want to commit to memory. My husband and I used to remark that our daughter's memory was like that of pre-literate people who could recite their lineage back for many, many generations. After all, that stands to reason; our daughter needed to remember things because she couldn't just go look them up again. Now that she reads, we see

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this aspect of her personality slipping away. This slipping is a part of growing up, but we are still partially sad to see it go.

When our daughter was not yet reading, every month or so we checked in with her to see if there was any progress vis a vis reading. There wasn't for a long time. Eventually, there was, and eventually there will be for Debbie's daughter too.

One approach to non-reading is to imagine what life would be like if your daughter were blind. Of course, you would never restrict her from the pleasures of books, even if she could see. From Debbie's letter, it seems as if she reads aloud a lot. I do too, but with four children, the reality of the situation is that the amount of time I sit and read aloud is limited. Furthermore, while reading aloud is a great family activity, there is something about the private world of books that shouldn't be missed. After all, curling up with a good book is one of the greatest pleasures.

That having been said, you might consider doing what we did and calling the National Library Service for the Blind. The number is 1-800-424-8567 (202-707-5100). They will refer you to your local library service for the blind and will send an application for Talking Books. If you haven't heard Talking Books, don't imagine that they're the same as any book on tape. Talking Books are high-quality recordings, four tracks per tape, and play on special equipment – all provided for free as long as you have a doctor's signature verifying blindness or an "organic learning disability." When you return your application, your daughter will receive a special tape player, a bimonthly catalog of books that are available and a yearly catalog containing a lot of books listed by subject. She sends in a request list and the librarian starts mailing them out. Among other things, getting that much mail is fun for anyone.

All this may sound simple to the parent of a child who reads. But for the child who doesn't, it is a lifesaver. Imagine the first time you walk into your child's room and she says, "This book is really a page-turner!" or "Wait 'til the end of the chapter." I never thought I would hear those words from my daughter, and when I did I felt really happy. Once she was an independent reader, she read all sorts of things and could talk with all sorts of people about books she had read on her own. (My level of tolerance doesn't include certain types of books, so even though I wasn't opposed to them, I just didn't get around to reading them.)

I think Talking Books are a great resource, one that most people don't know about. What's more, I think it is important to use "reading language" when discussing Talking Books. We said our daughter was "reading," not "listening," and, simple as it sounds, I think that way of describing it made a big impact on her self-esteem. Once she started reading Talking Books, she also began playing music and discovered that her ability to learn by listening was really fine-tuned, something we might not have realized otherwise. Lastly, our daughter's tape player became a sort of mascot. It is bulky, but doesn't require being plugged in, so she toted it wherever she went – in the car, up in a tree, etc. She's almost done with this mascot now, but we still highly recommend it for non-readers of almost any age. And by the way, we're still reading aloud to everyone in our family, readers and non-readers alike.

From Mary Anderson (OR):

After homeschooling with my children for 13 years, I have found what I consider to be the best reading program both to teach new readers and to help readers who are still struggling (both children and adults). The method is called Phono-Graphix and was developed by Carmen and Geoffrey McGuinness, reading instructors and researchers who have spent 20 years working with children and studying how they learned to read.

It seems to me that some children quickly memorize one-syllable words, but stumble later when they must read multi-syllable words or words with more than one letter representing one sound. Also, children often develop a reading strategy which may be incorrect and then stick with it even when it does not work. I believe that some very intelligent children do get stuck this

way, feeling bad when they cannot read but not knowing how to improve.

The McGuinnesses have written a book for parents to use with their children at home. It is called *Reading Reflex* and can be ordered from "Read America" at 1-800-732-3868. This book has been researched and proven to work on children aged 4 to adult nonreaders. It takes what the child knows – the sounds of his language – and teaches him the various sound pictures that represent those sounds, thoroughly and logically.

This sounds like an advertisement. Sorry about that, but I am excited at finding this program after years of wanting a program that could help nonreaders. I believe that most non-reading or nonfluent older children really do want to read. Perhaps the parent could say something like, "I know reading is hard for you right now. I have found a way to help you learn the reading code. It's not so hard to learn to read when you know exactly what to do. We can start any time you are ready."

Ordinary Kids?

Daniel Bennett (IL) writes:

I commend the honesty shown by Sherry Boas in GWS #122 in writing about the joys and concerns involved in raising three "ordinary kids." Although it must be very ego-gratifying to report of one's unschooled charges moving purposefully from one highly significant activity to another, the truth is, most kids *are* average. And if they're raised to feel that it's OK to be comfortable with who they are, the parent-pleasing current, which I believe underlies a great deal of "superstar" activity, may not be very strong.

In our unschooling household, we have a daughter of almost 17 whose interests seem as shifting as the sand on a seashore but are currently centered on aromatherapy and the study of witchcraft; we also have a son of 8 who spends considerable time running around the house in his underpants making the sounds of exploding missiles which, he explains, are being launched against the bad guys by various super-heroes such as Power Rangers, Ninja Turtles, and Beetleborg. Would I be more at ease with greater evidence of real-world, goal-oriented activity? Probably. Would that be more to their ultimate benefit? Not necessarily.

John Holt said repeatedly that what appear to us to be the frivolous, time-wasting, and otherwise unmarketable pursuits of our children are often in fact the means to an end which a child may not be able to articulate at the time and which we, as parents, may not be able to perceive. As an agent of mainstream society, mainstream education insists upon a declared major interest, or select few interests, at an ever-younger age; today, certainly no later than the senior year of high school. Although there will always be a small number of genuine prodigies whose natural abilities and inclinations are evident early on, it seems to me that most children are still very much sorting personal wheat from chaff during the majority of their teenage years. I'm increasingly convinced that they need to be allowed the freedom to do so, lest they join the unfortunate legions who end up, either via compulsion or default, mucking their way at midlife through an unsuitable field of endeavor.

I cannot recapture my own childhood, much as I would sometimes like to do so; all the energy and angst that went into trying to be *extraordinary* based on a barely submerged belief that I wasn't even *average*. Yet I hope I can learn from my children. At least I can help to provide them with the confidence they need to discover and direct the course of their own interests, along whatever lengthy and circuitous route that may require. If this means they find out they're average, I want them to be *splendidly* and *happily* average. To me, it's the stuff of mental health.

Ann Leadbetter (CO) writes:

I teach college freshmen. As a means of introduction, I have them fill in a questionnaire about themselves on the first day of class. The questions I ask are usually a combination of the following: What are you an authority in? What are your passions? Why are you in college? What are your life's goals? If money were no obstacle, what

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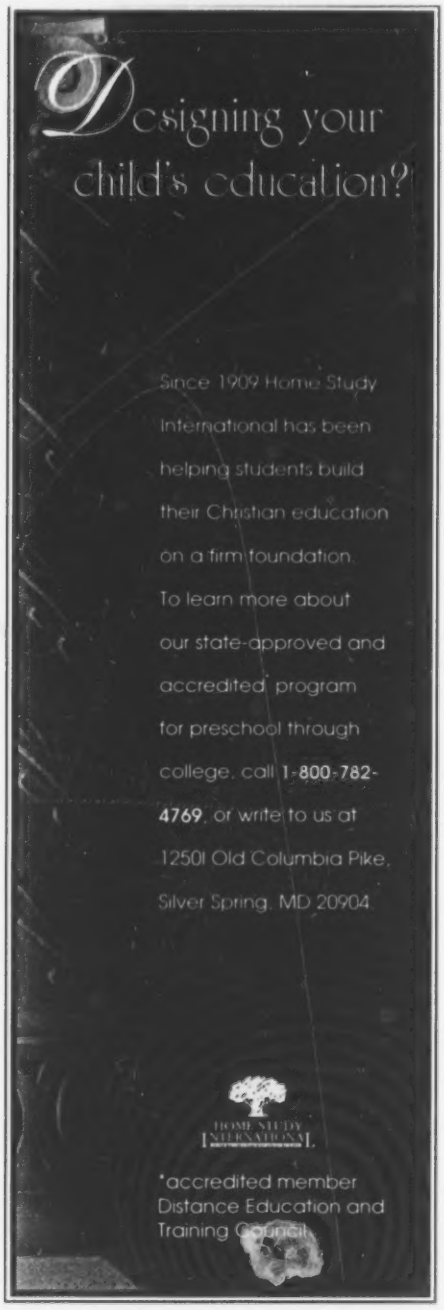
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would be your dream occupation? What will you major in? For the most part, these 18- and 19-year-olds have very little direction, few if any passions, many cannot think of one thing they are an authority on, and the most common answer to a future career choice is "one that makes a lot of money."

When Sherry Boas expressed concern that her children aren't superstars because they don't have "single-minded determination to pursue a specific goal," I think of the 100 or so 18-year-olds who pass through my classroom every four months who can't even generate a short list of interests, who can't think of one thing they know or can do really well, and whose only real determination is to have all the material possessions their parents have. I imagine if I gave Sherry's teens a questionnaire, theirs would be brimming with interests, ambitions, dreams, and possibilities, not the half page of dry, forced, lifeless, no-one-at-home responses I usually see.

Even if homeschooling teens haven't ended up with a ruling passion or have not accumulated a resumé of skills which can be translated into a livelihood, at least they know what it means to explore, develop, and pursue an interest. Because they have been allowed to manage their time, pick activities that interest them, spend as much time as they choose on any interest, because, in other words, they have had the freedom to find out who they are and what makes them happy, they engage the world with their whole minds. These kinds of minds will recognize the beginnings of passion and won't settle for a life spent merely bringing home a paycheck. When I check in with the students I've had as freshmen to see what decisions they've made about their major and their careers, the majority have ended up majoring in education, accounting, business, or nursing. They've chosen these life directions not because they have developed a love for the subjects but because they've come to realize they need a "practical" degree, one that will ensure them a steady, well-paying job.

Even if interest-based homeschoolers have no clear direction for their lives at 18, at least they go into the world with eyes unclouded by years of imagination-dampening busywork. The world thus appears as a place where there are plenty of interesting and relevant things to do and learn, because, after all, they've done plenty such things already. They will embrace the world and its possibilities rather than mark time for four years only to choose a safe major their junior year because they don't know what else to do and their time is almost up. I have faith that even if Sherry's teens don't know what college has to offer them, they will at least have open, eager minds capable of taking chances, and experimenting and engaging in new subjects, and the internal compasses to make life decisions based on their emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being. Their chances are vastly increased of being among the truly blessed, those whose life work is also heart, mind, and soul work.

So Sherry, even though the outward manifestation of your children's lives seems to you "ordinary," I believe their inner lives are extraordinary, especially compared with their traditionally schooled counterparts. And the fruit of this difference may not be in their financial status but in their interesting, interest-filled, and self-aware lives.

Homeschooling Kids with Autism

Kathy Noble of California writes:

I was very pleased to see the Focus on homeschoolers with special needs in GWS #121. I have long searched for information on this subject, and am very encouraged by these stories. I have a 4-year-old son who has been labeled as "high functioning" autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder. My husband and I have taken it upon ourselves to investigate and research the various treatment methods used with autistic children and have incorporated some of them into our homeschool program.

We joined a local autism support group when we first discovered what was going on with our son. We encountered very little support from the

group about our decision to homeschool; many advised us to seek services through the local Special Education District of the public school system. The consensus of the other parents seemed to be that the Special Ed District knew what was best for their children. The agenda of the Special Ed District became clear to us after our first meeting. They were the ones who knew what was best for our child, as they had been working with autistic kids for over 20 years. But a visit to their classroom for children with autism erased any doubts we may have had about our decision to homeschool.

In the past year, we have worked with our son intensively, and have seen remarkable progress in his language, motor, and social development. We have a tutor who visits three times a week to assist us in further developing these skills (this is paid for by our state's Regional Center for persons with disabilities). Our families are also amazed by our son's progress. Just a year ago, he was unable to communicate verbally or recognize others and the world around him. Now he is able to ask and answer questions, follow instructions, comment on people and things in his environment, and read "easy reader" books, among other things. He has a 6-year-old brother who helps him immensely and is very caring and patient with him.

We realize that we have only just begun this journey with him and that he still has so much more to learn. However, we also see how much he has to teach us and how much we have yet to learn from him. My husband and I have found that the best advice comes from trusting our own instincts and that our greatest support comes from each other. I would be willing to be a resource for other families.

Kathy adds herself to our list of resource people: Kathy Noble, 4775 Thomas Rd, Sebastopol CA 95472. See GWS #121 for our complete list.

Melissa Wagner of Michigan writes:

I have locked horns with the Director of Special Services in our school district more than once, and have learned a valuable lesson in the process: I have nothing to prove. In fact, I'm still learning to smooth off my rough edges after that enlightening experience.

I was interested in homeschooling before I even had kids. I still leaned in that direction when my son, Alex, was diagnosed as autistic at age 2. After I realized that the doctors offered only feeble help, I began my own brand of aggressive intervention. Alex made remarkable progress.

Shortly before Alex turned 5, I started to waver on the idea of homeschooling. I had a 10-month-old little girl just beginning to show subtle signs of mild autism. I decided to have Alex formally evaluated by the school district's team of professionals. I wanted to homeschool, but I thought that if anyone made a good case against it, I'd defer.

The outcome of the evaluation? Alex was diagnosed with high-functioning autism, with a borderline-mentally handicapped IQ. Recommended placement? Pre-Primary Impaired Program. Alex and I promptly visited a PPI classroom. I was shocked to find that was the best they could do.

I was armed for the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting the following week. It didn't occur to me to be intimidated by the seven- or eight-member team. I wanted some answers. I guess I immediately caught them off guard by refusing PPI placement. They seemed caught up in the results of the IQ test, but I dismissed them as preposterous. This child was very bright. I voiced my interest in homeschooling. They spewed the usual stuff about socialization, especially in our situation. And of course, they said the professionals were much better equipped than I to teach an autistic child.

Because I still wasn't completely convinced I knew better than they, I agreed to try the Early Fives program, with a teacher consultant and occupational therapy. I thought I'd homeschool concurrently. Besides, I figured, what could a year of Pre-K hurt?

But the decision never sat well with me, and over the summer I changed my mind and ended up going head to head with the Director of Special Services when I finally said

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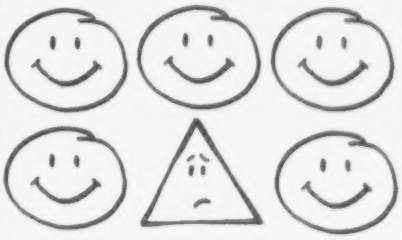

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"No, thanks." When I asked if we could just use the occupational therapist, they wondered why I would even try that. I ended up talking our pediatrician into writing a script for occupational therapy, which we only needed for three months.

Thus began our long ascent from red tape. Shortly after the school year began, I was summoned to another IEP meeting with the same Director of Special Services. I was told the meeting was necessary so that they could remove Alex from their program. I attended the curt meeting and received their official paperwork. The Director had scrawled, "Mother has refused special services and instead plans to homeschool." She then checked the box designated "ineligible." I questioned this, and she informed me that she had no choice if we refused services. She also claimed that I was the first parent in the district to refuse services. No matter how I argued that Alex was still "eligible," she held her ground. I had just signed up for the state's family subsidy for children with special needs, which I was excited about due to the cost of homeschooling. I asked the Director of Special Services how her "ineligible" designation would affect that, and she said she wasn't required to do anything with the paperwork until the end of the year.

To make a long story short, after numerous phone calls and letters in the spring, I faced the possibility of having to pay back every dime of the subsidy money we had received. I questioned everyone I spoke to about at what point Alex had suddenly become ineligible for this money. The Director of Special Services had informed me numerous times that if I ever decided to do it "their way," just let her know. Wasn't Alex, therefore, still eligible if all it took was a phone call? In the end, the state did not force us to repay what we had received, but they stopped payment on the spot. I did find out, though, that declaring Alex ineligible had been a mistake on the Director's part. She simply hadn't been willing to pursue the matter because she disapproved of my homeschooling. In any case, the state law has changed since then to specify that the child must be in an approved program to receive the subsidy. My argument that I was saving the state lots of money by homeschooling Alex fell on deaf ears.

In January of Alex's kindergarten year, I had toyed with placing him in the Early Fives program for an hour a day, in the aim of socialization. Since my son was recovering from autism with virtually no outside help, I tended to worry about my expertise from time to time. This required another IEP meeting with the Director of Special Services and the prospective teacher. The Director again focused only on IQ test results. When I mentioned how well Alex was doing, she informed me that "these kids" learn by rote, so don't get too excited. Then she told me I was obviously pushing him too hard. I wondered why I was defending myself in the face of such ignorance. I quickly made an excuse not to enroll once again.

When I ran into the Director late that winter, she asked about Alex. I told her I no longer considered him autistic, and she replied, "Once a child is autistic, he's always autistic." She then told me to call if I changed my mind about homeschooling.

We are now happily in our second year of homeschooling. Alex knows exactly what he wants to learn, and he needs to control it. I've learned not to impose my agenda because it simply doesn't work. He is an extremely bright 6 1/2-year-old with very few autistic traits remaining. We've used extensive homeopathy and trusted our instincts. My 2 1/2-year-old, Avery, responded much more quickly because we had experience. She also shows very little residual effect. Needless to say, we'll never again attempt public school politics. But the experience did teach me that I don't have a thing to prove, to anyone. Alex is all the proof I need. ◆

FOCUS

Can We Be Friends?

We asked young GWS readers, "Do you have a friend with whom you disagree about at least one important issue? Or whose life or background is different from yours in at least one significant way?" Then we asked how the difference feels and how it affects the friendship.

Differences in Schooling, Age, Nutrition

From Hannah Addario-Berry (BC):

The main difference between me and my friend Oona is that she goes to school and I don't. You would not believe how many hours we've spent discussing, arguing, conversing on, and debating this topic. Because we live about 100 miles apart and only see each other on periodic visits, these discussions are usually in large clumps. One night we were up until 4:00 AM having a very stimulating conversation. I don't think either of us fell asleep quickly; there was so much to think about.

The difference between Oona and other schoolers that I know is that Oona loves school and doesn't want to consider other options. Of course, I've given her a copy of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* and lent her all sorts of other reading material, but it doesn't convince her. We both respect each other's choices, but I don't think that she understands mine as much as I understand hers. Her life isn't foreign to me because I have been to school before, and I continue to go for occasional high school classes. But Oona doesn't understand my choices completely because they've never been a reality for her. She still asks me, "How's unschool?" as an equivalent to school. Every time, I try to explain that "unschool" is more just life than the opposite of school. But even though Oona doesn't completely understand why I don't go to school, she does understand some of the ideas and opinons that I support, even if she doesn't agree with them. She told me that she often has the same debates with her schooled friends, only she supports my side of the argument then. If she can support my side, it makes me realize that the conversations we have *are* meaningful.

I respect Oona's decision to go to school. One of her main goals is to go on to university, and she believes that the only way to do that is to go to school. Of course, I know otherwise, since I've just been accepted into a college's music diploma program. But that's an argument I don't think is worth having in this case. Besides, she only has one year of high school left, and it would probably take me at least that long to convince her that she doesn't need to go to college!

I think the most important thing that we know and respect is that we should be tolerant of each other's differences and not think of them as bad things, but just as our own personal choices.

Another friend of mine, Silvina, has been to school all her life, but that difference hasn't come up much in our friendship since she's now finished with school and doing a lot of the same things that I am. We are both serious cellists, both play in the same youth orchestra, have been accepted to the college music program here, and both have bright red hair! The main differences between us are age (she's 21, I'm 15) and our nutrition habits.

So far, the age difference hasn't made much of a difference at all. In fact, it was only after a few months of knowing each other that she asked me how old I was, and she was shocked because, she said, we didn't seem that different in maturity level and interests. Sometimes the age difference is obvious; for example, she can drive (which is nice because she gives me rides occasionally), she can go places I can't (not that I want to go to bars or x-rated movies anyway), and she's married. Most of the time, though, I forget she's older than me, because we have so much in common in our personalities and interests. And when I do think about our differences, it's neat, because I know she has a lot of knowledge about things I don't, so she has stories to tell.

As for nutrition, I have grown up surrounded by vegetarians – my whole family and most of our friends. So I was really surprised when I found out that not only was Silvina not vegetarian, but she was a major meat eater. I was especially shocked (and a bit put off) when she told me that her two favorite foods were pork and beef, because these have always seemed like the least appealing foods to me. Of course, since Silvina's eating habits don't affect me much in any way, the subject rarely comes up. But when I remember, I'm always surprised. I guess I've got the stereotypical meat-eater in my head, a stereotype that she doesn't fit at all. And since I hate stereotypes myself, I suppose I ought to get rid of it.

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Diverging Paths

From Noah Hughey-Commers of Virginia:

A couple of years ago, I had a close friend who was a homeschooler, like me. Then his mother died, and his father sent him to school. When I knew that our paths were going to be different, it felt a little sad, and I wasn't sure if he would become less of a friend. Now that he is in school, there *are* some differences in the way we talk and the way we act, but we do still keep in touch. When I'm with him, I don't think about the difference between us that much. It doesn't feel like a major thing, and it doesn't make me uncomfortable. We don't talk about it, because he's not the kind of person who would talk about something like that, but in a way, the difference is always there.

I wrote a piece about my feelings as my friend's path and mine have diverged:

We walked in the woods clasping hands, the afternoon sun pouring through the trees in radiant shafts of yellow warmth. Nothing mars that memory for me; no inequality separated us. We walked slowly down the path of life, silently enjoying each other. Eyes turned toward the paths ahead, we each saw a separate path in front of us; each path was meant for only one of us. But we thought we saw one path only, one path instead of two. We each took our own path, running quietly side by side, thinking that we ran together, oblivious that our paths were separating, slanting away from each other.

Now walking later down my life, I see his path away over there. But though I look and strain my hardest, which path runs straightest I cannot tell.

Encountering Differences at College

From Sara Shell (VT):

My closest friends now tend to be more different from me regarding values, backgrounds, and lifestyles than the friends I had when I was younger. One example of a difference that could get in the way of a friendship, but does not, is religion, in the case of my good friend Katy. I met her during my first couple of days at New York University two years ago, and we quickly became close. We were both dance majors and had several classes together, but beyond that we shared a lot of values, and our personalities were compatible. We both love animals and children and feel close with our families. The subject of our respective religions came up only incidentally, but became increasingly evident from Katy's choice of extracurricular activities. As a Catholic, she attends church at least once a week, is a member of the Newman club, and teaches Sunday school. I, on the other hand, attend services a couple of times a year for Jewish holidays but do not believe in God in a traditional sense.

I think there are two reasons why this major difference did not weaken my friendship with Katy. First, we spent so much time together in class, eating lunch together between classes, and attending dance concerts that it was OK for Katy to spend her free time doing activities in which I did not participate. Perhaps even more important, Katy's faith is a very personal, private thing for her. She does not need or want to talk about it all the time, and does not expect other people to share her beliefs. I think her religion defines who she is on a fundamental level more than it defines what she says or how she behaves. In any case, we agree on most of the social issues that are important to us, such as gay rights and gender equality.

I differ from several other close friends regarding my choices about sex. I view sex as a very meaningful, special kind of intimacy that I am not interested in sharing until I am in a stable, long-term relationship with someone I deeply love. For many of my friends, sex is an activity to be enjoyed as a purely physical experience and may or may not be con-

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nected to a long-term relationship. While I may feel they are making poor choices and tell them so, I do not try to pronounce judgments based only on my personal views. I choose what I feel is right for me, and my friends choose what they feel is right for them. They feel comfortable talking to me about their intimate relationships because they know I don't consider myself superior for making different choices. I accept their choices as part of who they are. So long as we can talk openly to each other, sometimes agreeing and sometimes agreeing to disagree, our friendships remain strong.

Different choices about drinking were something else I encountered when I began college. Most of my friends and acquaintances liked to go clubbing, alternating between getting drunk and staying sober to help drunk friends get home. Nothing about the club scene interested me; I would rather spend the money going to a dance concert. Even when friends drank in someone's room, I seldom participated. I do drink occasionally, but never enough to get drunk, because I have no desire to have my behavior or judgment markedly affected. By the same token, I don't enjoy hanging out with other people when they have had more than a couple of drinks. During my freshman year, I often felt that there was bonding taking place during the outings I avoided and that as a result I was missing out, although this incentive was not enough to convince me to join. I certainly never felt any overt pressure to drink – after a couple of invitations, people stopped asking. I feel now that I overestimated the importance drinking events had in the development of friendships. Although many of my friends are drinkers, we developed our relationships around commonalities deeper and more lasting than alcohol.

When One Isn't "Cool" Enough

From Shauna Edson (CA):

My friend Amy was one of my best friends when we were 8. The difference between us was that I was homeschooled and she went to public school. The year we were 8, she was a funny, considerate person. When we were 9, she started getting more influenced by the kids at her school and how they were acting. She started looking more unhappy. She always seemed to have her arms crossed and her head down. Our play dates got fewer and farther between.

When we were 10, it got worse. She started dressing like all the other "sheep" at her school. She started acting like them too, not talking to anyone who wasn't "cool" (like me). When we turned 11 and she hit middle school, we stopped talking altogether. But we still saw each other at church youth group. I figured she wasn't talking to me because I wasn't "cool," and I decided to respect that choice, and just wait it out until middle school was over.

We really didn't talk much at all during the next two years. I used to say that she didn't talk to me, but I now realize that I didn't talk to her either. Now that we're 14,

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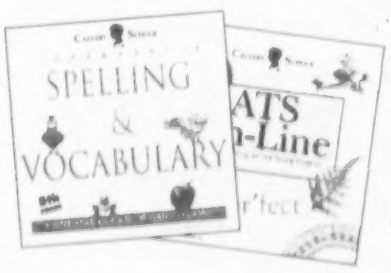

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we've both had time to grow and mature. We're not *friends* anymore, but when we do talk, it's pleasant. We've never actually talked about the time where we didn't talk. It's not really something either of us sees as an issue; we simply grew apart. We've dealt with it by just treating each other nicely when we do see each other. Now I've met some new friends with values that are more similar to mine. Many of them are homeschooled. Amy is still somewhat of a sheep, but she's nice to me again, and that's all I was hoping for.

Racial Difference, Personality Difference

From Andy Linn (MI):

I have a friend who is a different race from mine, but I don't pay much attention to the difference. In our friendship, it feels like we're mostly the same. I do realize that there might be some difference in his experiences or in his family's traditions, but to me, being friends with him doesn't feel different from being friends with someone of my own race.

With another friend, the difference is that I tend to be more quiet and he likes to talk a lot. It took a little while to discover that difference, but I think it's pretty nice. It means that if we're bored or something, he can always think of something to say! And we're similar in a lot of ways. When we were younger, we both liked to play Legos, and now both of us are really interested in computers and we both like similar sports.

Sometimes my friends and I have different opinions, but I don't think that's a bad thing.

More Comfortable With Difference Now

From Erin Hughey-Commers of Virginia:

I'm working as a counselor at a day camp this summer. It's a camp that our recreation department has organized at local schools. Up to now, I've made friends mostly within the homeschooling community or with adults. Now I'm seeking out interactions with people from other backgrounds, both by going to community college (which I plan to do this fall) and by working with the other counselors at camp.

The other counselors are teenagers like me – some a bit older or younger than me – and the main difference I see is in how we approach the kids we're working with. I came to the camp with a lot of ideas of what to do, like singing together, playing circle games, and dancing (because I teach a dance class locally). My ideas all involved having a lot of interaction with the kids because it seemed to me that so many of them were starved for any kind of connection. The other counselors seem more hesitant to do these kinds of activities; they don't seem to be as interested in thinking up activities or in having the specific goal of interacting with the kids. It's also that I'm interested in finding activities that the kids and the counselors can enjoy together, not just doing activities that we counselors don't really want to do but that we have to do because it's our job to take care of the kids.

I enjoy being with the other counselors and getting to know them, despite our different backgrounds and differences in approach. At the beginning, I was afraid the others might think I was trying to take over, because I kept coming up with ideas of what to do. But now I'm finding ways to have more input into the schedule; for example, as we're planning what to do the following day, I'll volunteer to offer a dance class. I don't want to be overbearing, but I would love for there to be more of a team spirit, with the other counselors thinking up ideas too.

At this point in my life, I find it stimulating to be around people who are different from me. Since I'm still at the stage of just getting to know these other counselors, it feels more comfortable to focus on talking about what we have in common. But once a tie is established between us, I think it will be easier to talk about some of the differences we've experienced in our educational backgrounds.

A few years ago, differences between friends were more likely to overwhelm me. When I was about 13 or 14, I was looking for a friend who would be just like me. I think that was because I wanted to build on who I was, to feel more secure. I began a friendship with someone then, and it turned out that we had vast differences in our religious faith. That was hard for me. We talked about it, but it didn't feel comfortable; it felt almost antagonizing. Interestingly, though, I've recently thought about trying to start that friendship up again, because now I think it would be interesting to talk about the differences between us. I have a feeling that we would find out that what we believe is essentially the same, but we just have different language for it – which is really true of a lot of things.

One reason I feel more comfortable about the idea of resuming that friendship – or having any friendship where there's a difference – is that since that time, I've formed a close

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friendship with someone who is very similar to me. That gave me the support I needed, and now that I have that stability, I'm ready to branch out, to be stimulated by other ideas.

Asking Questions of Each Other

From Margaret Knezek (CT):

We are in the woods. It's a perfect night for walking. We hook arms and Tara retells a story she heard, about a little Mexican church which had wax figures of the last supper. "A human tear was on Jesus's face," she said. "That's so pure. It really makes my faith stronger."

As we go on, I tell her of the grove of trees I found near my house. "I feel so cared for by them, so sheltered," I say. "It's like I can feel their hearts beating when I'm near them." She gives me a half smile and we move on.

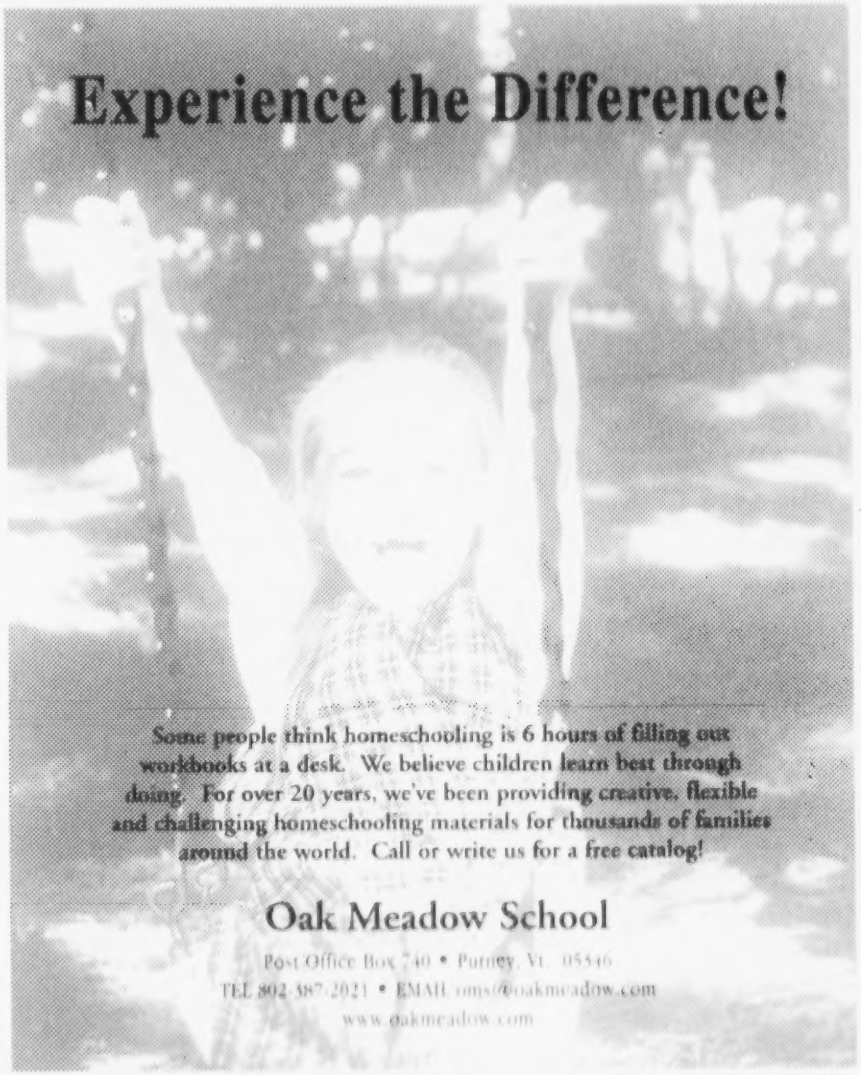
This night kept buzzing through my head when I thought of writing about differences between friends. Tara and I were both raised Catholic. We met in 6th grade and became close friends. When I left school after 7th grade, Tara was one of the only people from school that I stayed friends with. I'm 17 now, and Tara and I are still friends.

When I started unschooling (which had a huge effect on my life), going to church wasn't as important to me. I had more freedom to explore my beliefs. Tara, on the other hand, got more involved in her church as the years moved on, and she started going to confirmation classes. I slowly realized that I wasn't really part of an organized religion. I felt closest to my spirituality in deep nature or during ceremonies I've taken part in, ceremonies that mirror the beauty in life. Tara, on the other hand, had accepted God in her heart.

I think having this difference is good for our friendship. Tara can loosen up around me and not have to worry about saying anything immoral, and I get to hear about her beliefs and ask questions. That's what we do often: ask questions. We were not really open about the subject in the beginning. It came up occasionally, but we didn't discuss it in depth. Then one night she asked me why I didn't go to church anymore. This opened up the conversation and we spent half the night discussing it. Looking back, I think I must have realized that I was ready to deal with this difference between us and to talk about it.

Now we ask questions and we also draw scenarios for each other. For example, Tara might say, "If a friend of yours had a foretelling dream about you, that you were being hurt or something bad was happening to you, would you think it was a message from God?" My answer was, "I don't think I would approach it from a spiritual view. I might be scared and I'd talk about it. I would think of it as more about that person's imagination and feelings. I wouldn't be sure it was going to happen."

We both sometimes have trouble accepting each other's ideas. I see Tara give me crazy looks when I talk about nature being spiritual. Another time I might get frustrated with her and say sarcastically, "What does God think of body piercing? Is it unholy?" But overall I think we accept each other's beliefs. The difference in our beliefs isn't something that comes up every day with us, and we get along so well that our friendship works. ◆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Adults: Liberate Yourselves

Michael Fogler on *Un-Jobbing*

Michael Fogler, author of the book *Un-Jobbing*, says adults can free themselves from the drudgery of working just for a paycheck. Our working lives, he says, can connect with what we love and believe. In this interview, he talks about how homeschooling parents can rethink their work and how young people can take the unschooling outlook with them as they enter the working world.

Susannah Sheffer: What's your own un-jobbing story?

Michael Fogler: I was conditioned like everyone else to want the conventional lifestyle of a full-time job with benefits and so forth. But I failed at that; I didn't have any success in getting that full-time job. As a matter of fact, I'm in my mid-40's now and I still haven't gotten it, and now probably never will!

I had originally been trying to get a full-time academic job in the music field, which is difficult enough, and I was in a specialized area – classical guitar – that was even more difficult. Then I left that and tried to get some other related jobs in the academic arena, but that didn't work either. Finally I started to conceive of a different way of looking at life. I began to see that maybe I didn't really want a conventional, full-time job, and maybe it would be possible to embrace my situation. Maybe I could actually be happy without a full-time career. In addition, my wife, who *had* the full-time career job, was ready to quit it.

SS: Before you reached that point, were you angry at having failed to get the jobs you were trying for?

MF: Yes, I was certainly angry. But trying to get a job felt like banging my head against the wall, and of course that hurts after a while. When I finally stopped banging, right away I began to feel better.

SS: I wonder, too, if there was any sense of having been betrayed, a feeling that school (and for that matter the whole society) essentially says to us, if you play this game well, you'll be rewarded at the end with a job. And now it was as if whoever made that promise to you had broken it.

MF: Absolutely. That was very much a part of how I felt. I bought into the idea that if I do this, I'll get that, and I *was* angry that it hadn't worked out that way. Now, of course, I'm glad about how things have worked out.

SS: What's your situation now that you don't have a full-time career?

MF: Our entire family leads a home-based life. I have a 10-year-old son who is unschooling, and my wife and I both have basically home-based, freelance lives. We're doing what we really want to do. Some of our activities bring in income; some don't. My activities involve music, partly, and then of course now there's this book I've written and the workshops I'm doing as a result of it. I'm also editing a monthly newsletter for The Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice. And I'm spending a lot of time with my son.

SS: I wonder if some might say that it's one thing for someone who has *failed* at getting a conventional job to embrace the idea of un-jobbing, but why would someone who has succeeded in conventional terms need to think differently?

MF: There are plenty of people who have been very successful at what I failed at and are also very unhappy. So this issue is really, "Am I truly happy, am I spending my life in a way that's in alignment with my values?" And people who are successful can get trapped by the idea of security. They'll say of their job, "This is taking care of me really well, this is bringing in the paycheck, and if I let go of that, what if nothing takes its place?" That's the fear. When I do workshops, the latter section is devoted to airing out all the fear, all the "what about ..." and "what if ..." questions. It's important to do that, because thinking like this goes so much against the conventional grain. And in fact, the fears never completely go away.

SS: Sounds rather like homeschooling! Do you think there's a particular way in which it's difficult for men to let go of the idea of getting a conventional job?

MF: Yes, I think men are even more strongly conditioned than women about the need to be the providers, although I do think the idea is pervasive for everyone. A lot of the time when I give workshops about un-jobbing and voluntary simplicity, it's

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the women who show up and who then say, "I've got to talk to my husband about this." Women have been more open to options with regard to employment.

For me, I made a conscious decision to be a strong presence in my son's life, and my decision about employment is part of the whole fabric for me. It's true that as a man who has chosen a more home-based life, you do get some raised eyebrows. There are those who don't think very highly of the idea. But then there are those who are feeling stuck in their own situations and wishing they could break through the fear to make a move themselves, but they don't do it. So I get a mixture of reactions, but after a while I began to stop worrying about what other people are thinking anyway, because that's out of my control.

SS: Let's talk about how unjobbing applies to homeschoolers in particular. I'm sure you know that when people begin thinking of homeschooling, one of the things they think of is how to make it work financially, especially if they've been relying on two full-time incomes up to then.

MF: I'd encourage such a family to do a lot of homework with their family budget to see if they really do need all the income that's coming in. I describe how to do this in my book and I give references for other books that help. If a family can lower its expenses, that can buy them the freedom to do what they really want to be doing. And often, families find out that two incomes do not produce more spendable money, when expenses for the two-income lifestyle are factored in.

SS: Sometimes when families are already homeschooling, it's actually the children's freedom that prompts the parents to do some re-examining of their own working lives.

MF: Yes, this is the parallel, because in school, a child begins to feel, "This school owns me, there's so little time left that belongs to me." Well, the same thing often happens with jobs. What I'm trying to say is, let's have every minute belong to you. In our society, it takes a considerable amount of homework and self-reflection and support from others of like mind in order to do this.

SS: When some people consider lowering their expenses, they wonder whether they'll feel deprived if they can no longer do, or have, things that they've enjoyed before.

MF: Everything is a trade-off. The freedom to spend your life in a way that's truer to your heart is rather priceless. The other thing is, a lot of things that people spend money on are time-savers and conveniences that they feel they need because they're in a job that's sucking up so much of their life. When you do the homework and evaluate that, you often end up seeing that a lot of the spending is not making you happier. Relieving yourself of that is liberating, not a campaign of sacrifice.

SS: What about the homeschooling family who says, "But there are so many great experiences and activities and materials out there and we do want our kids to be able to take advantage of them."

MF: There are certainly a lot of great experiences that aren't expensive. But I'm not saying that spending money is the enemy. It's spending money that's out of alignment with your values. If something you want to spend money on truly is in alignment, then go for it. You'll get enough benefits from it that it will be worth it.

It's also true that the creative things people do when they don't have

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SS: What about the homeschooling kids? I wonder if homeschoolers can get a jump on all this by being able to do work that they love early on. Years ago we put out a booklet called *Earning Our Own Money*, which consisted of stories of how kids under 13 earned money, and one thing that surprised and interested me was how many of them were able to earn money doing things that they really liked, things that involved their skill. We don't usually think of young kids being able to earn money that way.

MF: What we prepare for is what we get, so if we're preparing our children to create their own lives in ways that really fit them and that honor their unique role in the world, then of course it would make sense that they would be more likely to continue that way as adults.

SS: Just now I mentioned kids getting paid to do what they really love, but what about the related idea, which is taking a job that may *not* be especially rewarding but that supports the work you really care about? I'm thinking of a young person who works part-time as a waitress in order to support her work as an artist, or whatever.

MF: I think people who do that are able to see the job for what it is. I tell people not to limit themselves to career terminology but to think in terms of "casual income," income that's maybe necessary to afford something but isn't thought of as a lifelong career track. People can think in a much more relaxed way about their jobs. They can say, "I'm doing this in order to do that." The problem is when that kind of activity gradually increases to take up your whole life.

SS: In our 20th anniversary issue of GWS, it was interesting how many of the grown homeschoolers raised the topic of work. Clearly for many this is the next frontier, the next part of life to try to evaluate and perhaps see in a different way. I'm thinking for example of Josanna's story in that issue, in which she said that she had been working full time, at a job that she *did* like, but she couldn't stand working for an institution and had cut back to part time.

MF: Yes, quite often an activity is fine if it's for 10 or 15 hours a week, but at 40 hours a week you feel owned by it. I really think that the notion of full-time employment is purely a modern invention. It's not necessary for life on Earth. Balance in one's life is extremely important to one's overall well-being.

SS: Josanna also said that she realized she was going to have to find a way to extend the unschooling approach into her adult working life. What would you say to her about the chances of that working out?

MF: I'd say the same thing I say to older adults: take leaps and follow your heart. Part of the issue for many people is that they want to know, if I do such-and-such – like reduce my hours – will things work out? But as long as I'm staying at point A and wondering if point B will work out, I'm not going to know. You have to have courage, faith, and trust and make the next step.

SS: And I suppose you could also point out that a person can always go back to the job they had before (or something like it). If you have certain skills, you can always use them if you find that the risk you took *isn't* working out as you hoped.

MF: Nothing's forever. You can dip back and forth. Things are happening in my work life now that I didn't know about five years ago; the book is a good example. And ten years ago I didn't even have a computer, much less know anything about it, but I've since learned editing and layout skills and now people call me and ask me to help with their newsletters, and

I often get paid for that. In any case, it's really a myth that you have to choose one job to do forever. Young people are asked, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" as though they have to choose one thing. Maybe this was truer in the 1950s or '60s, but by now, the kind of job where you agree to enslave yourself to it and they'll take care of you for the rest of your life – that's become an endangered species. Which is actually a positive thing, though it scares people. Even conventional economists are saying, "You'd better start thinking of making it on your own, not expecting this company to be the answer." One economist even called it de-jobbing, and this was a very mainstream economist.

SS: Kim, another grown homeschooler, wrote in our anniversary issuse, "Is it possible to love your work?" She had come to the conclusion that it was possible, *had* to be possible, for her, but she said that when she was growing up, she was surrounded mostly by adults who hated their jobs. What would you say to someone in that situation?

MF: I'd call upon her to be a leader. If what you're seeing around you is not what you want, do what you want *in spite of* what you're seeing. You've had many examples of this in GWS, of the kids being inspiring to the parents.

SS: Yet I know from my young friends how hard it can be to forge that new path and do something without any examples. From my perspective, it's very important to connect young people with adults who do love what they do.

MF: Absolutely. Those of us who are living this way can be mentors to young people. I know that my own son, of course, is seeing a very different model; he doesn't see his parents going off to a job every day and then coming home and griping about it. And a lot of the kids in our neighborhood come by our house and see a very different situation from the one they know. They must be absorbing *something* from that. I also love when young people come to my un-jobbing workshops, and I get letters now from readers who are 20 or 21 and haven't even gotten started in the career world yet. They say, "I don't want to get started down that miserable path that my parents hate."

SS: John Holt wrote about giving a talk to students in the 1970s in which he distinguished between jobs, careers, and work. A job, he said, was something someone told you to do and paid you to do, a career was a succession of such job, each one presumably better than the last, but work was something more like a vocation or calling, "something which seemed so worth doing for its own sake that they would have gladly chosen to do it even if they didn't need the money and the work didn't pay." He said the saddest thing was to see how incredulous the students were about this idea of work. They couldn't imagine it.

MF: My sense is that at least some kids would be more receptive now. There are many more failures at the conventional approach nowadays; the misery index is higher. So people are more open to alternatives. In my book I quote Matthew Fox who said, "Work is the joyful returning of your gifts to the community." I think many young people are receptive to thinking of it that way.

One of the part-time jobs I've held was being an advisor at a college to students who were undecided about their majors. An advisee would ask, "What's the major that will get me the job with the most money?" This was in the '80s, and I think times have changed even since then. I know young people who have opted not to go to college, for example, because they see college as basically being about career tickets, and instead they pursue what they enjoy – and lo and behold things work out. I have hope that these young people will be forces for change.

Un-Jobbing: The Adult Liberation Handbook is available for $12 postpaid from Free Choice Press, PO Box 10[illegible]7, Lexington, KY 40588. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

The Fun of Homeschoolers' Math Clubs

Gail Helms of California writes:

Reading of homeschool science fairs in GWS #121 inspired me to write you about an ongoing science and math group my son and I enjoy. "Investigations" is a co-op workshop providing children ages 6-12 the opportunity to explore math, science, and construction centers run by parents. The group was organized by a homeschool mom.

Rogan (age 6) and I look forward to meeting with the group twice a month. When we arrive at the neighborhood church, which we rent by collecting a dollar per person each time, Rogan scopes out the possibilities: four or five centers, each focusing on an intriguing concept. Yesterday, we were greeted with shouts of "It's floating!" from the carbon dioxide/soda pop experiment table. Elsewhere, a boy had set up his own Möbius Strip center. 'Try cutting a strip in half, and predict what will happen!" an enthusiastic girl told me. Children were busily planting seeds in honor of spring, then constructing Gardening Logs to go with them. At one end of a tale strewn with origami paper, a 6-year-old was coaching his buddy on the art of paper crane folding. At the other end, adults and children challenged each other to strategy games: Tapatan, Pig, and Four in a Row. Rogan was immediately engaged by the games and chose to spend the entire two hours there.

Each center is planned, set up, hosted, and cleaned up by a homeschool parent. Since there are about 25 families involved, we are asked to sign up for a center a couple of times each semester. We can volunteer to make reminder phone calls and collect the rent monies as well. To help us out, each family was given a handout with a list of possible broad topics: Science: observation, exploration, and experimentation; Technology: construction, creation, invention, machines; Math: number concepts, problem solving, algebra, geometry, etc. The handout included a list of math and science resources plus phone numbers of a few parents/teachers to call for assistance. The handout also recommended that we keep it simple, relax, be flexible, and have fun.

I've enjoyed my stints as host so far. I like brainstorming for intriguing ideas, thinking up hands-on ways to present concepts, and seeing the "Aha!" light up children's faces. Keeping it simple *is* key, I've learned; that way, you can more easily maintain the experiments, answer questions, and give children help if needed. Two other things I've learned: keep the cost of the supplies as low as possible, and test all experiments at home first. Hosting centers has provided me with the opportunity to delve into how an airplane flies and how electric circuits are built and work. Concepts I knew very little about I now clearly understand. My son benefits from assisting in the planning and testing of experiments. Perhaps he'll create and host his own center some time, as children have recently been invited to do.

During the two-hour session, children are free to visit any center. Although I have the choice of dropping Rogan off there, he likes me to be there with him, and I truly enjoy discovering alongside him. I enjoy the enthusiasm, the cries of "Oh!" or "Whoa, check this out!", the odd smells, the smoke, the bubbles, the clicking, banging, and whirring, the pencils scribbling as children record their finds. We end each session with a circle time, sharing our discoveries. The mom who created the group, or an attending teacher from the Independent Study Program we're affiliated with, heads the gathering. Both are good at giving everyone a chance to talk about his or her important discoveries.

Rogan and I have been attending this group for four months now and are both still eager to go – as it seems everyone is. Ten-year-old Justine, a regular participant, says, "There's always something fun to do, and you're not required to do anything!"

Marjorie Rolleston (NY) writes:

I always assumed my daughters would learn to read quite naturally, but I wasn't so confident about math. I have math horror stories liberally sprinkled throughout my childhood. My math career ended when I passed the Geometry Regents Exam (a required exam for students in New York) with a 65 and my math teacher and I celebrated our good fortune.

When we announced our decision to homeschool, people gently reminded me of my ineptitude in math and asked how I could possibly teach it to my children. I explained that my children are their own teachers, that I would help them find resource people, that their father is a scientist and could probably handle the math for a while. My daughters were just toddlers at this point, so I knew I had time to work it all out.

The days and years passed. We went on with the business of daily living, filled with projects, adventures, and activities. And it dawned on me that not only do we live in a reading house; it had become a math house too. In a fabric store, I was adding and multiplying fractions in my head, figuring out square footage of our rooms so I could buy paint. I was measuring to build raised beds for our

vegetable garden. My daughters were right there with me every time. I suppose I was teaching them math.

Our homeschooling support group, Rochester Area Homeschoolers Association, recently held a Math Fair. For our project, we decided to put together a book of math as it happens in our house. We took pictures of ourselves and others caught in the act of doing math. We have pictures of the girls counting their allowance money, making a purchase at a local store, playing Monopoly, Yahtzee, and computer games. They are telling time with both analog and digital clocks, having their piano lesson, reading the calendar, cooking, playing with Legos.

We discovered that math happens everywhere, that it doesn't exist only in textbooks. We also discovered that we are quite able to do any and all math required of us, and we enjoy it. Carolyn (6) and Jennifer (7) have no anxiety when it comes to figuring out something they've never figured out before. I have even heard them say, "I'm really good at math" and "I like math; it's fun." And I'm betting that when we have a need to use geometry, I will discover that I'm pretty good at that, too.

Denise Gaskins sent us a copy of her *Math Club by Mail* newsletter. She writes, "When I asked a few 4th-8th grade homeschoolers over for an afternoon of math puzzles and games, I wasn't sure what would happen. The kids wondered how anyone could have fun with math. But they did enjoy themselves, and when one girl had to move away, she said she would really miss Math Club. So I thought, 'Why not make a Math Club newsletter? The other kids who had wanted to join (but wouldn't fit around my dining table) could enjoy it too.'"

The newsletter includes problems, games, historical tidbits, and math art. It doesn't give the answers, promising instead to give them in the following issue, "but I hope you will get them a long time before that," writes Denise. A single issue costs $2, one year (6 issues) costs $10 from Tabletop Academy Press, RR 1 Box 114, Blue Mound IL 62513-9709.

Games, Not Flash Cards

Sue Smith-Heavenrich (NY) writes:

Toby is in the process of learning about multiplication. Though he understands what it is (conceptually), he needs continual review of the basic multiplication facts. I hated flash cards when I was a kid, but not knowing what 8 x 9 = without using a calculator is a handicap when I'm doing simple calculations. Like filling out those lovely forms the IRS sends each year, or figuring what the total bill should be with tax while at the check-out.

Here are a couple of our family's flash card alternatives:

Drive-by Math: While we're driving, I choose a number from 1 to 10, and Toby begins counting by that factor up to 100, or as high as he can go. Twos, fives, and tens are the easiest. Threes, fours, and elevens are more challenging, but still not too hard to do. Sometimes we have challenges and try to see if we can count by 13s or 15s.

Math Wars: When my children were learning to count, we used cards a lot. War was always one of their favorite games. So it was almost natural to extend war games to include addition and subtraction. Now we do multiplication wars. You need two decks of cards, aces through 10s (each person should have the same number of cards to start). In traditional war, each person puts down a card and the highest card wins (takes both cards). In math wars, you put down two cards, work the operation (+, −, or x), and

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the winner has the highest answer. It's lots more fun than flashcards. To make it more challenging, anyone who miscalculates must surrender two cards to the other player. Needless to say, when I pulled out an 8 and a 9, I knew I was a goner.

Games of Chance: My kids love Dungeons and Dragons, Magic, any game with the element of chance. When Math Wars just didn't seem challenging enough, we created yet another game of numbers. We taped the operation symbols (+,–, x) on a die – two of each. Then we dealt out cards, as in war. One person rolls the die, and everyone puts down two cards. You calculate based on what you draw and what you roll. The winner takes all!

After our last game of Math Wars, Toby counted the cards to see who won. Because of the quantity of cards involved, he decided that counting them would take too much time, so he explored a couple of alternatives. First he stacked each card pile neatly and then measured its height. Because there was only a three-card difference in the piles, this did not turn out to be a good way of determining the winner. His next method was to compare the weights of the piles by using a balance with two pans. This turned out to be very effective. After determining the winner, he used 5- and 10-gram masses to find weights of various numbers of cards. I believe it's 7 cards to the 10-gram piece. When he begins to convert grams to ounces, and tells me how much gold I owe him, I'm sending him to the assayer's office.

Learning Out of Order

Cherylee Duncan (MO) writes:

Something encouraging happened last week that I'd like to share with others who may doubt themselves or worry if they're doing school "right" or in the right order. Our family has begun to study European countries because we are planning to take a trip to Europe in the fall. So my daughter Cally and I have been studying France. As always, we got as many books, cookbooks, and videos from the library as we could find and also read about France in the atlas and the encyclopedia. The more we read, the more bits and pieces of French history began to catch our attention. Cally started asking questions about Louis XIV, Marie Antoinette, Joan of Arc, and the French Revolution. I remembered that three years ago, when Cally was in fourth grade, we had looked at the books *What Your Fourth/Fifth Grader Needs to Know* and that they had material on these topics, so we got them from the library. In looking through them now, I suddenly had flashbacks of the first time I had looked them over – when Cally actually was in fourth grade.

I remember panicking back then when I saw all the information the books contained and the blurb at the beginning that said every fourth grader *should* know this stuff. Cally didn't know any of it. Neither did I, for that matter. I flipped through and

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read about Joan of Arc and thought, why should a fourth grader *have* to know this? I knew that Cally wouldn't be interested in it at all and that if we read it, especially with all the other dry stuff that preceded it, she'd never remember it because she wasn't interested in it then and didn't have anything in her life to relate it to. Nevertheless, I remember feeling that maybe I should teach this material because the book said I should.

I guess my inner voice won over, though, because although we used the books for their section on literature, we didn't use the history part. But now, three years later, when I got the books again, the history section made sense. This time the information fit in with all the other things we had been studying and Cally had something to relate it to. She (and I) found the information interesting and *useful*. I know much of it will stay with her because of that. It makes me really glad I didn't go straight through the material just because of the book's title but instead saved it until we needed it.

An Adventure: Rescuing Wild Burros

Elizabeth Powell of Washington writes:

I have always loved animals, ever since I can remember. But it's since I quit school that I've gotten a chance to make them a huge part of my life.

Last February I started out on a three-day long driving trip with Diana Chontos. Our destination: Death Valley Junction, California, a ghost town on the outskirts of the Mojave Desert. Diana is the co-founder of Wild Burro Rescue, an organization dedicated to saving the burros in Death Valley National Park. Five years ago, Diana and her husband Gene persuaded the National Parks Service to let them take a certain number of burros, who are not native to Death Valley, out of the park. In turn, NPS ceased shooting them. We were on our way to conduct the annual live-capture round-up.

For the past two years I had dreamed of taking my first strides into the world of helping animals. During my stay at Death Valley Junction, I felt I was able to make a contribution to what Wild Burro Rescue was doing, which was a truly satisfying feeling. Though I was the youngest volunteer (I'm almost 15), nobody treated me like I was inferior, and people were very open and willing to share their knowledge with me. I got a chance to help with a number of things I'd never done before, from setting up corral panels to making friends with wild burros.

Elizabeth with one of her wild burro friends

While I don't claim to have a special connection to every animal I meet, I do feel enriched after spending time with any non-human creature. I got the chance to make friends with an incredibly sweet domestic burro, and a wild horse from the herd that hangs around Death Valley Junction fell in love with me (the feeling was mutual!). That's not to mention how amazing it was to see these burros, just a few days out of the wild, enjoying being groomed and eating carrots from our hands. Everyone was astounded at how fast they forgave us for taking them away from their home.

It turned out that I learned as much about human behavior as I did about animals. The people I met on my trip were actually the biggest part of my experience. I saw that to organize and be part of a huge task like this, you had to be able to communicate and work well with the widest variety of people. I've discovered that one of my favorite things to do is meet new people who share my interests. Unschooling has really helped me in that respect, because in school I was very reclusive. Since quitting, I've met a wide array of people, and in these two years I've become a totally new, more outgoing person. I'm convinced that had I stayed in school any longer I would have ended up a social misfit.

There are a lot of opportunities open to young teenagers that many people aren't aware of. Sure, it can be frustrating to search out the perfect volunteer or work position, but once you find someone who shares your passion and is open to your help, the possibilities are endless. Also, it surprised many of our friends that it was my mother's idea for me to go on this trip. My mom and I have often had disagreements about how protective she should be of me, but since she trusted me and we'd taken time to get to know Diana well, she felt comfortable with this whole thing. That just goes to show that you never know how people will surprise you!

I know I will always look back on this trip as one of the best times of my teenage years. I often wonder how my life will fold out before me as the years go by, and I envision many more wonderful experiences coming my way.

For information about the wild burro rescue project, write Wild Burro Rescue, 665 Burnt Ridge Rd, Onalaska WA 98570. ◆

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1998 Directory was published in GWS #120.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the Directory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

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- CREATING OUR OWN CEREMONIES
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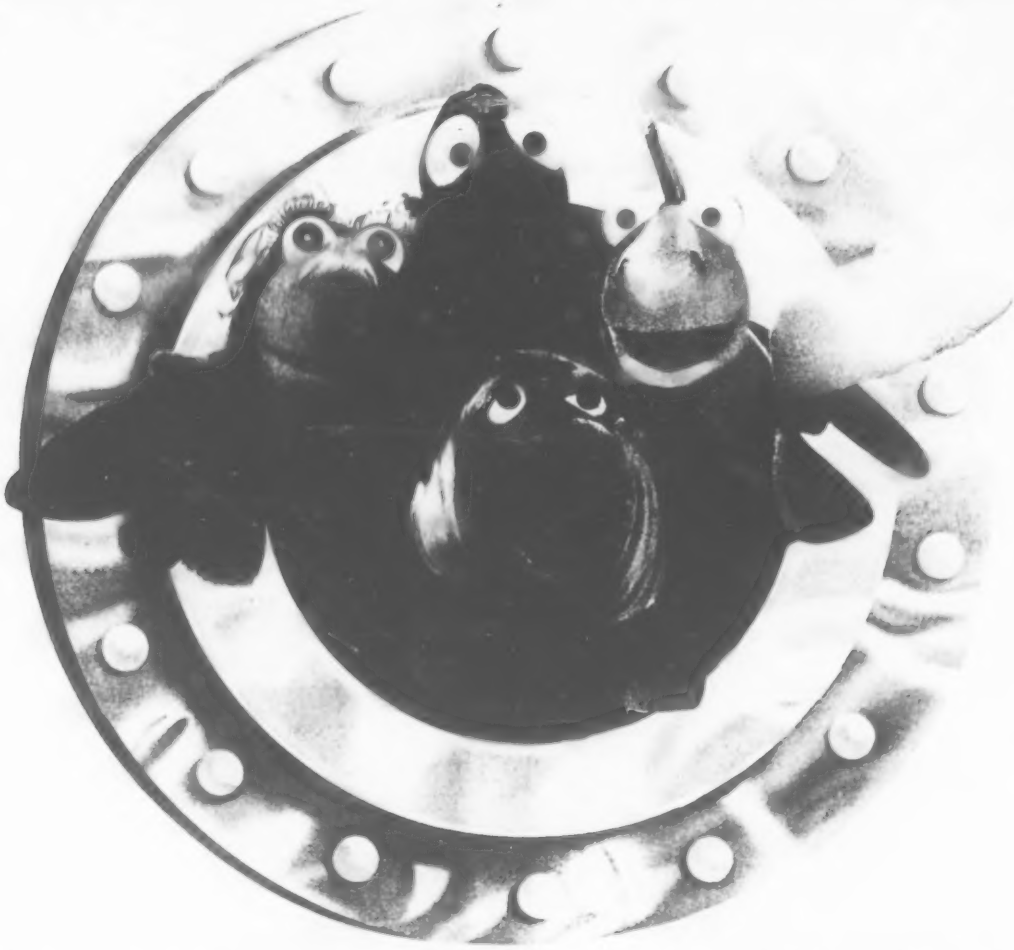

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Issue #125
Nov./Dec. '98

GWS

Founded in 1977
by John Holt

GWS is based on the idea that young people are good at learning and that learning happens everywhere. Our stories explore how people of all ages learn and grow and how others can best help them. GWS is an ongoing conversation among its readers, and it allows homeschoolers (and other interested people) to share experiences, thoughts, questions, and concerns.

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From the Editor

In Antoine de St. Exupéry's book *The Little Prince*, the prince asks, "What is a rite?" and the fox replies, "Those are acts too often neglected. They are what make one day different from all other days, one hour from all other hours." The fox knew that there is value in having special times like this, times of distinction that mark, honor, or celebrate.

Of course, sometimes rituals seem artificial and unnecessary. Graduation ceremonies may seem to celebrate the school more than the young graduates. Rituals marking the end of one grade or the beginning of another seem to break into segments what might more properly be viewed as a continuous process of growth. Many homeschoolers are happy *not* to have to think, "Seventh grade is finished now" or "You've completed your study of American History."

But stilted and arbitrary though some may be, it seems to me that there is nonetheless a place for ceremony and ritual in human life. Why do people persist in having wedding ceremonies and funeral rituals? Why do so many parents like to create family traditions on birthdays and holidays? And why do so many young people – even those who are growing up without schooling – seem to seek out their own significant moments? A young child says, "When I'm 6, I'll ..." and you can see by the gleam in his eyes that he has made his own special determination about what that chronological age is going to mean. A 14-year-old says that in the past year she's begun taking greater stock of her goals and thinking more about what she wants to do with her life. Though that feeling may come partly from external forces, there's clearly also something rising up from within.

The continuum of growth is marked by times of more obvious transition and reflection. In this area as in so many others, homeschoolers have a chance to decide on the marking points and to create the accompanying ceremonies for themselves. In this issue of GWS, parents and young people write about what made them feel a need for a ceremony and what kind of ceremony they created. Like so many things homeschoolers do, these events were as personal and individual as the families themselves. At the same time, the ceremonies were also about connection between young people and their community.

We mark a child's height on the wall year after year, and the accumulation of those marks records growth that we might miss while right in the thick of it. Other ideas suggested by the families in this issue are ways of recognizing less corporeal kinds of growth. In a talk he gave in 1983, John Holt observed, "What children need from us is not praise but acknowledgment. They want us to notice what they have actually done." The rituals and recognitions described in this issue are exactly that: a form of noticing, of loving attention. Whether it's a "word present" given to a young child or a much more elaborate gathering of thoughtful comments for a 13-year-old, these are all ways of saying "I notice you; I am paying attention."

– Susannah Sheffer

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News & Reports

The Truancy Problem

[SS:] Local homeschooling newsletters periodically print stories about homeschooling kids being stopped on the street and questioned about why they aren't in school during the daytime hours. It seems that when a community makes a point of cracking down on truancy, families have greater concern about a homeschooler being questioned as well. The August 1998 issue of the Wisconsin Parents Association newsletter, for example, writes, "Some communities now conduct 'truancy sweeps' in which young people who are not in school and do not seem to have a valid excuse are taken into custody. To minimize the chances of their children having a negative experience and of the family getting into difficulty, some homeschooling families think carefully about where their children are during conventional school hours. Some parents explain whenever possible that they are homeschooling to neighbors, librarians, and others who may be observing their children outside a school building during school hours." WPA adds that some children carry copies of the form that Wisconsin home-schoolers file; others sometimes carry a letter from their parents saying that they have permission to be at the library (or wherever). Other homeschooling groups around the country have created photo IDs, similar in appearance to school IDs.

Though these measures are often necessary (or, at the minimum, some discussion with one's child or teenager about how to tell an adult courteously but confidently that one is homeschooling and is allowed to be out during the day), it seems so unfortunate that young people who are out and about during the day are suspect. Meanwhile, school officials seem to miss the deeper lessen that widespread truancy could be teaching us. A recent article in the *Boston Globe* (9/2/98), headlined "City sets a hard-line policy on truancy," says that Boston students have one of the highest rates of absenteeism in the country and that some high schoolers don't show up for weeks at a time. The solution? Truant officers visiting the parents of children who play hookey more than three times a year, and incentives – like pizza parties, movie tickets, alarm clocks, and raffles – that will reward attendance. Boston's mayor even said of this new plan, "Children have to be in school to learn ... And if they are not in school they are not going to learn.".

What are these students refusing when they don't show up at school? Why is school unappealing without a pizza party or the threat of the police at your door? What are those truants doing with their days? What else *could* they be doing? The really unfortunate fact is that fairly sizeable grants – both federal and private – are funding these truancy crackdown measures. What if that money were used to address these other, deeper questions?

Office News

[SS:] Thanks once again to our subscribers and customers who have been patient with us as we have continued to endure changes in our office staff and in our shipping department. The kind words and expressions of gratitude that you consistently send our way mean a great deal to us. We also appreciate those of you who responded to our request in the last issue and volunteered to distribute bimonthly flyers for us which announce the highlights of the upcoming GWS issue. If anyone else can make good use of such flyers, do let us know. They're distributed during the odd-numbered months: November, January, March, and so on.

Pat Farenga and I are excited to be speaking overseas for the first time. I will be speaking in London on November 7th, at The Open University. The event is organized by Leslie Barson of The Otherwise Club, the homeschoolers' resource center that was on the cover of GWS #120. Then next April, Pat Farenga will speak at an event organized by Education Otherwise, the United Kingdom's national homeschooling organization, and at another event in France.

We were pleased to see GWS mentioned in a story in *Seventeen* magazine about homeschooling teenagers ("Learning Curve," in the Sept./Oct. '98 issue) and in another story in the September issue of *Woman's Day*. The *Woman's Day* piece, though very short, talked about what other parents can learn from homeschoolers. It would be great to see an article about what other educators can learn from homeschoolers, next.

We hope you like the new look of GWS's cover, which was designed by California homeschooling father Kim Stuffelbeam.

We'd like to hear from GWS readers about the following topics:

- Learning from play. We'd like to hear parents' observations about how their children's play helps them make sense of the world. We'd also like to hear from older children and teenagers – and adults too – about how play helps *you* learn and explore. Is there play – casual exploration, messing around, fantasy, pretend, imagination, and so on – involved in your pursuit of history, or art, or writing, or science, or other activities and studies?
- Grandparents and other relatives and family friends who *do* support homeschooling, or who were once skeptical but have become supportive.
- Teenagers who are out of school without a lot of parental support. What *are* your sources of support? What kinds of support or resources do you wish you had?
- Learning science, social studies, or history in interesting ways, especially through community activities. ◆

Native American Homeschoolers

Announcements about the newly formed Native American Home School Association have appeared in several homeschool newsletters. The Association was created by Misty Dawn Thomas, Chairwoman of the Ani-Stohini/Unami Nation. We asked Dr. Charles Thomas, advisor to the Chairwoman, to tell us about the background of the Association and its projects and plans:

Homeschooling has always been an option for Native American people, because that's really the only way that we can pass down our language, our dances, our songs and music, and our crafts, to our children. You can't learn these things in schools.

During the 1950s and '60s, Native Americans throughout the United States went through a vast assimilation program by the federal government. Children were taken from their homes to be put into federally run reservation schools or off-reservation mission schools. Even though this assimilation policy is no longer as harsh, in some ways it never really died, because it lingers as a mindset for many Native American families.

The Ani-Stohini/Unami nation is a non-federally recognized tribe. We are one of the oldest continually existing tribes in the Americas. Like other non-federally recognized tribes in the east, since the turn of the century we have faced a situation in which local school superintendents would forcefully take children and put them in public schools, with the threat of Social Services if the family refused to comply. For that reason, a lot of eastern tribes actually lost their native languages. Up until 1924, it was not against the law to kill an Indian east of the Mississippi. So, as you can imagine, those remnants of tribes which had *not* been brutally evicted by Andrew Jackson's course of removal then had to keep a low profile. If they attempted to remain culturally active, they took great chances. Even after 1924, there was still great pressure to keep the people from teaching their own children, and there was pressure on the children to assimilate and to forget their native language and culture. When you're in a school system that doesn't teach your culture, where you're learning from peers rather than from adults, and then you come home and your parents are speaking a different language, that language and the things the adults are talking about don't relate to your experience as a child. Our chairwoman, Misty Dawn Thomas, says of her experience in government schools, "They just tried to shame the culture right out of us. In my case, it didn't work. It won't work on my children either."

Our particular tribe hid out in the mountains – in a three thousand square-mile area of Virginia and North Carolina, some of the most rugged country in the United States – and thus we managed to retain some of the culture that a lot of other eastern tribes have lost. But even so, today we have less than 30 native speakers of our language. We're trying to salvage that. Our chairwoman has directed that every child born now will learn the Tla Wilano language, and to that end, we're working on a language book and a dictionary. We're also working on our own history book, and we're working with other groups to learn how to educate our children and give them the tools to function outside our culture but also give them the parts of our culture that they need to know.

"They just tried to shame the culture right out of us. In my case, it didn't work. It won't work on my children either."

Our chairwoman is probably one of the most recognized Native chairwomen in the United States. She's used to bucking mainstream ideas, and before forming the Native American Homeschool Association she had already worked on many other issues. For example, last year she lobbied to preserve and protect the Indian Child Welfare Act. In the past, when officials did implement that threat of Social Services that I mentioned earlier, oftentimes they actually took a child away from the Native family, and then these children were just adopted out. The Indian Child Welfare Act was passed to keep this from happening. It's now illegal for Social Services to take a child out of the Native American environment without going through the local Native American tribe or agency or cultural association. Maybe in a particular situation the parents are unfit and there is a justification for taking the child away, but

that's for the tribe to resolve, not a government agency that comes in and tries to help an adoption agency get these children. Recently there was legislation pending to repeal the Indian Child Welfare Act, and our chairwoman, working with a Congressman from Virginia, did some strong lobbying to save it. She has also lobbied hard for protection of the southern Appalachian Bog Turtle, a sacred animal of the tribe which is also an endangered species. The turtle received federal protection in November 1997, the same year that the Indian Child Welfare Act was preserved.

So, the Native American Homeschool Association idea came about as something we just felt we had to do. There are a lot of people who don't know that they can homeschool or don't know enough about the laws outside of their culture, don't know that they can fight the people who would take their children away to have them educated somewhere else.

Our primary project right now is to develop a curriculum that all Native Americans can incorporate for their own use. We want to offer ways to learn about traditional culture, right alongside of the state requirements for homeschoolers. Each tribal administration can adapt it to the needs of their tribe. As you may know, history books and history teachers in the classroom have presented a slanted view of American history. Our history as we would like our own children to know it is very different. We see the Native American conflict differently, and we even have a different emphasis on common things such as children learning about Will Rogers. You learn about Will Rogers the comedian, but no one ever brings up that he's Indian.

We want to have a curriculum available for our own children but also for anyone else who wants to study Native American history and culture without the whitewash that the public schools usually put on it. If you want to learn about Native Americans, Native Americans are your best source.

In some respects, the legal situation for Native Americans who want to teach their own children is different from the situation of other homeschoolers. We have a lawyer who is familiar with federal law pertaining to Native Americans, and this helps us. Because we're a nation within a nation, we have different court systems. Federally recognized tribes have to go through the Department of the Interior; non-federally recognized tribes have a little more leeway, because they can go right to the federal court, but then it depends on the federal government's view of their rights. Suppose there is a conflict between a district superintendent and a family about the education of a child. With Native American families, there's a third entity involved in that conflict: the tribal government. The tribal government's viewpoint is important. If they're supportive of the family in question, they have certain options. For example, they can bypass the entire state process. They can say,

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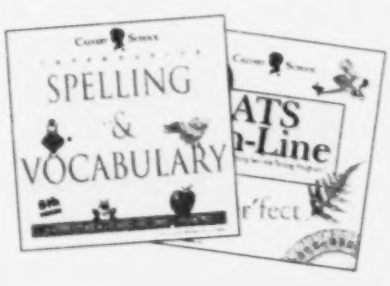

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"OK, you have a state law that says this family has to follow certain requirements, but we have a different law." In the case of that kind of conflict, the matter would be thrown into a federal court to get a decision. It's a conflict between two sovereignties, rather than between one family and the state. Then, there are judicial committees within Congress to which tribes can appeal as well, which takes the conflict totally out of the realm of the court system. These are all situations, and ways of handling the conflict, that a non-Native homeschooler is not going to encounter.

But the primary overlap, the thing Native American homeschoolers share with other homeschoolers, is the desire to teach our children as we think best. That's sort of a universal homeschooling idea that crosses social, cultural, and economic boundaries. And we also share the idea that the public school does not fit the needs of our children.

The Native American Homeschool Association would like to organize a conference that would be open to the general public, to learn about different aspects of Native American education. We also have speakers available if other conferences are interested. And we would like people to know that our Association is open to all. Membership is $25, and if you are not a Native American but you join our Association, you have just helped someone learn something about Native American culture and you have also helped us obtain the legal protection for that person's right to learn those things.

Native American Homeschool Association, PO Box 979, Fries VA 24330; phone 540-744-3640, web site: http://www.expage.com/page/nahomeschool ◆

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- Sometimes, if we need to, we visit the wool mill, livestock auction, lumber yard or harness shop.
- We make music (just for fun).

A TYPICAL FARM DAY

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Afternoon: projects or trip to livestock auction or creekwalk.
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Challenges & Concerns

OK Not to be Social

Yvonne Garson (ON) writes:

In "Gaining Comfort with Freedom" (GWS #122), Suzanne Soule mentioned that she is not a very social person and that neither are her kids. Neither is my family. We live in the city and it has been work making a quiet space for ourselves. I believe it requires bravery to state that one is not a very social person in a world which seems to regard popularity as the first and most important law of life. In fact, I think that most of our fears about socialization stem from just this feeling that it is necessary to be popular. The thought of being the wallflower at the high school dance might bring memories back to some of us. Even now when I walk into a big crowd of strangers, that fearful feeling of possible rejection can sometimes strike with a vengeance.

The thesaurus lists being social with words like companionship, good fellowship – where? In the community, the public, and the world. There is nothing said about popularity. Perhaps good fellowship can be extended to everyone we meet in our everyday life. Perhaps it can even be extended to the world while we are home alone (it is possible to love the world while sitting home alone). Companionship can be extended to all we meet: the waitress in the donut shop, the friendly librarian, and so on.

Since my daughter Helen (now 8) was a baby, she has resisted all my attempts to socialize her. When she was a baby she hated crowds and a lot of noise. As she became a toddler and then a preschooler, I signed her up for all the prescribed activities: gymboree, a parent-tot program, etc. She resisted all these programs, letting me know in every way possible how much she hated them.

When we found out about homeschooling, I jumped on the bandwagon and started to create a social circle. I invited possible "social candidates" over for play dates. Helen hid in the basement.

Because of my daughter's resistance, I had to finally realize that what she needed was not more socialization but space to be herself and to interact at a level she could handle. Now that I've backed off and learned to relax and realize I don't have to accede to our society's belief in a social status quo, I can just let us be ourselves. Helen is happy being at home alone with me most of the time. She has two friends her age, whom we have over almost every week (but not together). Her Grandma comes over almost every week, and I believe she is Helen's best friend. Helen has a hard time going out to restaurants, the library, and other people's houses. Sometimes I still try to push her into things. Luckily, she still resists and lets me know in her own way what she needs.

As for me, I've found I'm a lot happier staying home quietly, rather than trying to chase down some strange belief of what I should be in the world's eyes. I mean, some belief of what I used to be like: signing up for everything, planning and always organizing things. Now I'm a lot more selective about what I'm involved in, thanks to my daughter. She's been a wonderful teacher for me. I've joined a meditation group and that's really helped me to learn how to be quiet on the inside.

So thanks, Suzanne, for your bravery and thanks Helen for being who you are.

When a Relative Disagrees

Julie Scandora (WA) writes in response to Vicky Meier-Jahn's "Handling a Relative's Criticism" (GWS #121):

People tend to see the world and its problems in the context of what is most important to them. I suspect Vicky's sister, a special education specialist, looks at all children for their deficiencies, in light of her training. As we homeschoolers know all too well, people will not learn until they're ready. One who does not believe in homeschooling, especially unschooling, will not listen openly to our side of the story until he or she is ready (and does not feel threatened). Since homeschooling can be seen as a threat to a public school educator's purpose, there is a good possibility that Vicky's sister will not soon toss aside what she has been taught. It does not matter how well the boy (Vicky's son) is doing. Her sister will continue to see him through her special education specialist's eyes. Those are not Vicky's eyes. She just cannot see what Vicky sees, no matter what Vicky or her son may say or do. Accepting that is important, to keep from being continually frustrated.

It seems to me that the key is for Vicky to find a balance between maintaining good relations with her sister and supporting her son in his time frame and method for learning. Since her sister's suggestions not only undermine Vicky's self-confidence but may undermine her son's as well, I think it would be best to find a diplomatic way to keep the sister from interfering.

One way is to do what many doctors do. They do not treat their own family because they may not be objective in their analysis. Likewise, Vicky could tell her sister that while she appreciates her concern, she feels a person outside the family would have a more objective view. She could further explain that this would allow her sister to act more the loving aunt, rather than feeling obligated to work during her free time (by testing and evaluating her nephew when she visits him). Whether Vicky bothers to consult another specialist is up to her. Any queries by the sister into that can

be brushed aside with a "We prefer to keep that confidential."

Another possibility is to minimize interactions where the sister has a chance to test the boy. Keep contacts to times and places where many people are around, for instance. Or go the other way and just have Vicky get together with her sister, without the boy.

Vicky could also just say no to her sister. She could thank her for her concern and offer to help, and leave it at that. There is no obligation on Vicky's part to accept the help, nor need she explain her decision.

More on Homeschoolers and Technology

It's the Questioning that Counts

From Janet Rhodes (CO):

I read the articles about "Homeschoolers and Technology: A Closer Look" in GWS #124 with interest. We're a homeschooling family with internet access, so we are somewhat technologically informed. I found the two articles side-by-side, with their seemingly contradictory messages, very thought provoking. On reflection, though, I think they had a lot of common ground.

It seemed to me that the authors of both articles were advocating thoughtful use of technologies. The authors all advocate an approach to technology that is not mindless – that is, taken at face or popular value with no thought to its ultimate effect on our lives and goals. Loretta Heuer has obviously thought through whether the internet and other technology can help her family members achieve their personal and educational goals. She has seen through the restrictive and, to her, false goals the schools have for using technology, and rejected them. But she didn't reject the tool itself. Her family has decided parts of the technologies are helpful and have formed their own usage standards. How they came to that decision is the important thing, it seems to me: they considered the tool, reflected, chose, and acted accordingly.

Matt Hern and Stu Chaulk together have engaged in the same process of considering, reflecting, choosing, and acting, but at a deeper level. They are concerened that overuse and overdependence on technology leads to weakened communities. They have identified values they consider important – local relationships, local communities – and express doubts that a machine can give us what we need to strengthen those values. Their reflections, based on their values, resulted in the article they wrote, urging us to look beyond the internet to how it affects us and our world.

The articles' commonality is that the authors all have a set of values and ask questions about whether this aspect of our culture will support those values or not. They have not mindlessly either acceded to the idea that the internet is an essential part of our everyday life nor thrown the whole technology out the window (I note that Mr. Chaulk runs a small internet consulting business). The point is, we all have to know what our values are, question whether our culture supports those values, and choose how to act as a result. We all need to engage in mindful living as well as mindful learning. The authors are discussing the internet in these articles, but they could just as well be discussing what we do in our community volunteer work, or how to help our children through the teen years, or any other issue we face in our daily lives. What matters is the process of reflecting and acting in accordance with our deepest values in all aspects of our lives.

As homeschoolers, we have already rejected many of our cultures' assumptions about who we and our children are or should be. We have already begun the process of deciding just what we really do value and how to structure our lives to integrate those values and actions. Deciding thoughtfully how to use the internet and other technology is just one more step along our own roads to integrity.

Internet Means Access, not Insularity

Glenn Holliday of Virginia writes:

Some thoughts on "Homeschoolers and Technology: A Closer Look": Loretta Heuer has a good grasp of using technology to accomplish things.

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rather than allowing the techno-du-jour to use your family. I fear that's exactly the point that Matt Hern and Stu Chaulk miss in their essay. They point out a valid fear and express it well. I think there is evidence for both positive, useful virtual communities and the wasteful and harmful variety. That's a topic for a much longer discussion, to which Hern's and Chaulk's essay is a welcome contribution. I agree with some of their criticisms of the Internet. But I think they mistake their fear for the central essence of the Internet.

The major argument I read in the piece is, "Society pressures us to replace our social fabric with a new online community. This is bad." But plugging into an online society is not something that Internet does very well, and doing that misses the whole point of having an Internet. Hern and Chaulk write, "Delving deeply into the Internet is ... an insularity from the real world." I don't think that delving deeply into the Internet is creating insularity; it is gaining access to the original sources in many fields of knowledge. The Internet is for moving information around the globe.

In scientific fields, I cannot afford to buy all the monographs and journals that document the original data of important developments. But I can find and use many of the original data on the Internet. In arts and history, I cannot afford to travel with my kids to Europe – or even most parts of the U.S. – to examine the original works that make the past continue to live. But I can find high-quality facsimiles of many of them on the Internet. My rural county library contains only a tiny fraction of the great literature of the world. I can afford to bring only a smaller fraction home. But I can find a much bigger part of the written and orgal heritage of all cultures on the Internet.

Working with original sources is important for the deep study of any topic. One of the big promises of the Internet is that anybody can work with these sources now. My children don't have to rely on how one writer summarizes what happened, but can play with the messy conflicts of how the people who were there recorded it.

I believe the Internet is not for

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creating inferior societies to replace live people but to find and use resources I could never get to in the physical world. Self-directed learning at home took off in new directions when my children could look for weather data at the Weather Service, astronomical information at the Naval Observatory, and many original texts at Project Gutenberg. When I decided I wanted to complete my own Master's degree, I was able to create the thesis at home with my family, rather than moving 300 miles to the major university that graduated me, because of the Internet.

Saying "people use the Internet to withdraw from people, therefore we should not use it," is like saying, "people sniff glue, therefore we should not use it." Problems associated with a technology are a reason to address the problems, not a reason to reject authentic good things that are also associated with that technology.

As a coda, let me say that many of the resources I mentioned are most appropriate for people old enough to comprehend adult writings and the sorts of work that originates at universities. My younger children use computers as tools to create their own work, but I haven't yet found many reasons to turn them loose on the Internet. There are a few, but widely scattered and of haphazard quality.

She Wants to Love Her Work: Is She an Idealist?

Lindsey Johnson (GA) writes:

I feel that it is very important to be around like-minded people, or at least to have some sort of contact with them (via letters, for example). I was going back over GWS's 20th anniversary issue and I read Kim (Kopel) Stewart's letter about finding work you love. Sometimes, when I talk to people (mostly other teenagers) about unschooling, they say, "Well, what are you going to do when you have to get a job and submit?" A family member also frequently poses this question. I've been trying to come up with an answer, something like, "If we need to, we will" – which is true. But I've privately felt that I would *not* submit, that I would not cherish my freedom now only to give it up when I got a job. I have not said this, though. I suppose that I have assumed people would think me strange if I said this, would consider me some sort of idealist who has a vision of a utopia where everyone does work they love and makes money doing it.

Guilty as charged. I no longer think it is bad to be thought of that way. But I do occasionally have battles in my mind. Is it crazy of me not to choose college? Is it absolutely insane of me to say that school stifles everyone? Is it preposterous for me not to be very interested in the whole high school social scene? Is it stupid of me to believe that you don't need a degree to be heard or taken seriously? (I'm still working on that one. It seems that for most people to listen to you, you have to be able to say, "I have a degree in this.") Does it make me a moron if I believe that people know what is best for themselves and that they do not have to be taught or watched or controlled to become good people and to grow?

Yes, I know, I'm talking about a bit more than jobs here. Sometimes people make me feel that I've got my head in the clouds, that I have idealistic dreams of a world which does not exist. Sometimes I accuse myself of this. I just have to remind myself that there are *many* lives worth living out there.

I want to do work that I love. And I *know* that there is work worth doing out there. I know that there is work where I can make some sort of difference and touch people. Sometimes I get a trifle scared because I do not have a certain career path yet. Because I don't, it seems a waste of time and money to go to college right now. Outside of college, I can roam about the world! I can try different things. I can do one, two, three, or a dozen things in a year. I could be biking in Utah or roaming a huge library. I could learn *from* the world instead of learning *about* the world. Please do not think I'm trying to belittle anybody who is in college or is planning on college. Perhaps college is someone's way of learning from the world; at this time I just do not think it is mine.

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A Father Questions College

John O. Andersen of Oregon writes:

Dorothy: "How can you talk if you haven't got a brain?"

Scarecrow: "I don't know. But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking, don't they?"

– The Wizard of Oz (MGM, 1939).

Our culture has more or less bought into the idea that going to college is just one of those things you're supposed to do. Increasingly, parents feel they are required to finance their children's education even if it means mortgaging themselves to the hilt or working crazy hours. Few ever dare to question this assumption, at least not in public. Yet, my wife and I question it and are happy to reveal our heretical thoughts to the world.

Generally, we think college is a good choice for many. It was a good choice for me. I enjoyed exposure to a new world of ideas and people. I made lifelong friends. I expanded my intellectual horizons. And frankly, it was a fun time. Nevertheless, since the years I attended college, things have changed somewhat. For instance, in many places careerism has all but destroyed the notion of a classical education. Not that careerism is necessarily bad, but rather, it seems to me that far too many colleges have transformed themselves into career-training factories. Largely gone is the notion of fostering renaissance men and women, who are more intent on reforming and improving society rather than becoming just another cog in its machinery.

Another disconcerting fact about college today is that it's getting very expensive. In the past, more students could work their way through without incurring significant debt. Over and over I read statistics which "prove" that even with a much higher price tag, the long-term benefits of a college education still make it a bargain. But sometimes I wonder whose interest is best served by that "proof": the individual student's or that of the massive higher education industry? Furthermore, I often question whether the "doors of opportunity" which college supposedly unlocks actually lead to places where people truly want to go. Maybe the "doors of opportunity" are just the passageway into an adulthood of Babbittry.

My wife and I want our children to make the best of themselves, but hesitate to conclude that college is the way to go. At one time, I bought into the conventional wisdom that although college wasn't the only option, most young people should aim for it. Then I met my wife. She grew up in Canada and England. Her father's military career gave her the advantage of living in a variety of places. She is well-read, writes better than most college graduates I know, and is well-informed on a variety of subjects. And, she has never completed a college course. In addition to my wife's influence, my unforced and enthusiastic choice to be "downwardly mobile" had a major impact. After more than a generous helping of institutional higher education, and having launched a successful white-collar career, I felt confined. My freedom came in quitting my job and opting for manual labor. That step, more than any other factor, opened my mind to a new perspective.

Our primary reasons for questioning college are these: first, for us, self-education is what sticks. We think that self-education with passion is the learning which truly becomes a part of us. Occasionally people tell me that if I hadn't gone to college I wouldn't be as equipped to be a good self-learner. To a small extent I would agree, but in a larger sense, I believe the passion to know is what makes a good learner. It's not the number of degrees after your name. Second, we prefer learning at a slower pace and savoring it along the way. Often, my experience with learning in college was like drinking from a fire hydrant: too much, too fast. There was rarely ever enough time to let things sink in. Occasionally it made more sense to give up on actually learning anything and switch to "binge and purge mode." In other words, memorize what is necessary to get the "A" and then purge it from the brain at the end of the semester to make room for the next binge. We hope our children won't feel pressured into the bingeing and purging mode so as to miss the pleasure of

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taking it slow and savoring all of the joys along the way. And, we question anyone who implies that accumulating credit hours and degrees is proof of learning. That mentality recalls the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz who, upon being granted his wish, declares: (putting his finger to his head) "The sum of the square roots of any two sides of an Isosceles triangle is equal to the square root of the remaining side. Oh, joy, rapture! I've got a brain!" (MGM, 1939) The scarecrow parodies those people who believe that learning means stuffing your head full of facts or having a wall filled with certificates and degrees. While that may give the appearance of learning, we like to believe the essence of true learning is a change of consciousness. Among other things, it can be a greater appreciation for people, and ideas, and a sense of awe and wonder. As we know, the scarecrow had all of that long before he went to the wizard.

Over the years when we've been vocal about our questioning of college, we've been pelted with a variety of objections. Below are four of the most common ones and our responses:

1. You're pulling a slick one all right! You've had a generous helping of college, yet you're going to deny your own children the opportunity to even go to college.

We didn't say we're against college. We tell our children that college is only one of many valid options they may choose. Equally valid would be a trade school, an informal apprenticeship, or simply getting a job doing something they enjoy. We make it clear that it's more important to listen to their heart than their peer group when it comes to structuring their life. We will apply no pressure to choose one option above another. Rather, we will equip them with the knowledge and tools to enable them to choose from a variety of paths.

2. If your children don't go to college they'll be stuck in grunt jobs for the rest of their lives.

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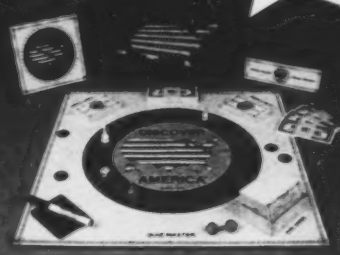

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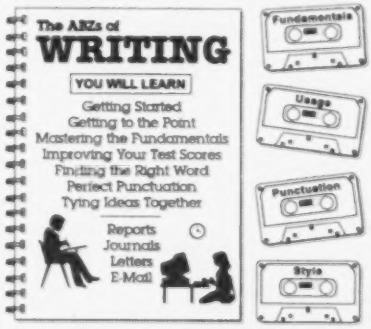

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abundant time for contemplation. Not too shabby. Jobs which punish creativity, force team play and pressure people to wear a public face which is at odds with who they are inside, could also be defined as "grunt jobs." If a "grunt" is someone who does disagreeable work, certainly people in such careers are in reality more like "grunts" than an autonomous janitor.

3. What about the intangibles of college: exposure to new ideas, making close friends, etc.? Aren't those alone worth the price of tuition?

College can be a way to acquire those intangibles. But it's certainly not the only or even the best way. True learning demands patience, an inquiring mind and commitment. Shelling out the big bucks doesn't foster those traits. On the other hand, a lifetime of passionate hounding of public libraries can achieve amazing levels of education. And we don't need to open our wallets to gain true friendships either. We just need to open our hearts.

4. What if your children decide later in life that they want a career that requires a degree and have to go back to school? Wouldn't it have been better for them to have gotten that degree before they took on the responsibilities of work and raising a family? We think "going back to school" later in life is actually the best way to do it. That is, if you truly want to learn something and really think you need a degree. Getting through college while holding down a full-time job and/or raising a family can be a long slog. Yet, we feel such a task is not impossible and is actually getting easier with the proliferation of evening programs, correspondence courses, and Internet offerings. Personally, after having entered the work force, I found that I got much more out of my formal studies. As an inexperienced college student between the ages of 18 and 22, I had only a vague idea of what goes on in the outside world. I lacked a practical sense of how things actually worked or didn't work. Hence, much of the "learning" didn't register.

College can be the best option for many people. If it is for our children, they'll go. But more important, we hope they'll enjoy the freedom to choose from a wide assortment of options without pressure from the outside world to choose one thing above another. After all, they're the ones living their lives.

Queries

Does a Serious Athlete Need High School?

Milva McDonald of Massachusetts writes:

My 13-year-old daughter adores sports – basketball and soccer, specifically – and is very serious about them. She is currently receiving loads of pressure from friends and family members, and coaches, to some extent, about attending high school. The message she's getting is that she won't be accepted into college as a serious athlete without a strong, traditional academic record. She's hoping to earn an athletic scholarship and has high aspirations for which schools she'd like to attend and play for, and is worried about jeopardizing her chances.

While I can tell her confidently that homeschoolers attend college all the time, I'm not knowledgeable enough about the collegiate athletics scene to give her reliable information. Have any homeschoolers dealt with these issues?

Seeking Writing from Teens

I am compiling a book of writing by unschooled teens, aged about 12-18. I would like to hear from interested writers about their unschooling experiences. Writing could be a specific story about something that happened as a result of being out of school, or more about your unschooled life in general (your interests, work/volunteer stuff you do, your goals, etc). For complete information, please send a SASE (Canadian stamps), or an International Reply Coupon to: Hannah Addario-Berry, PO Box 5602, Victoria, BC, Canada, V8R 6S4. Or e-mail: caddario@islandnet.com

I am looking for homeschoolers, unschoolers, and self-learning teenagers to fill out a questionnaire for a future book. Any teenager interested can write to Elizabeth Kenyon, 445 S Brewer St, Manchester IA 52057. ◆

Resources & Recommendations

Book on Adventure Careers

Beth Kaseman (WI) writes:

As homeschoolers, we have the strength, ability, confidence, and experience to choose work that is more than just an ordinary job. In addition, one of the perils or benefits (depending on your perspective) of homeschooling is that after experiencing the freedom inherent in such an individualized approach to learning, it is difficult (or maybe impossible?) to settle for 40 hours a week of boring work. As one person quoted in the book *Adventure Careers* puts it, "I didn't want a life I would need a vacation from, to complain and struggle to regain my composure ... . [I am determined] to make the things that are important to me a standard part of my life, not something I have to go on vacation to find." I think other homeschoolers are likely to enjoy this book, which is by Alex Hiam and Susan Angle and is subtitled "Your Guide to Exciting Jobs, Uncommon Occupations, and Extraordinary Experiences."

We need two things to build a "career jungle gym" (instead of a career ladder). One is an idea of what we find exciting. (Not everyone has found something they love doing yet.) The other is resources to track down or create meaningful jobs. This book helps people find both. For example:

- The chapter on self-exploration includes thought-provoking exercises. Listing personal values is used as a way of discovering what is meaningful and important. From our individual values, we can build our goals.
- A good checklist empowers readers to translate into traditional terms, when necessary, skills gained in alternative ways.
- Various creative strategies for getting jobs, including volunteering and internships, are discussed.
- Individual chapters provide general information, personal stories, and a directory of resources in areas such as volunteer and community service, starting a business, art, politics, travel, etc. Although these chapters often emphasize overseas travel, many opportunities exist closer to home as well.
- Throughout, Hiam and Angle remind us that we have control over our lives. They also caution, "Don't allow concerns about career planning to get in the way of personal development and growth. Life can be a career, but no career should be allowed to become a life."

The weakness of the book, from my perspective, is its frequent mention of college degrees. In my experience, degrees are not necessary for an "adventure career" and they can even sometimes get in the way, because they require a lot of time, money, and reliance on conventional thinking and institutions.

Nevertheless, if you're looking for fresh perspectives on careers and employment, resources and suggestions for ways of pursuing an adventure career, and support and encouragement that is often hard to find, this book is certainly worth picking up.

Children's Music Network

Irene Glassman, who used to be on our staff, told us about the Children's Music Network, an organization that Irene says is "dedicated to empowering children and respecting their voices." The literature about the group explains that this non-profit organization, with membership across the U.S. and Canada, "includes full-time and part-time performers, professional and amateur songwriters, classroom teachers and music educators, record producers and distribu-

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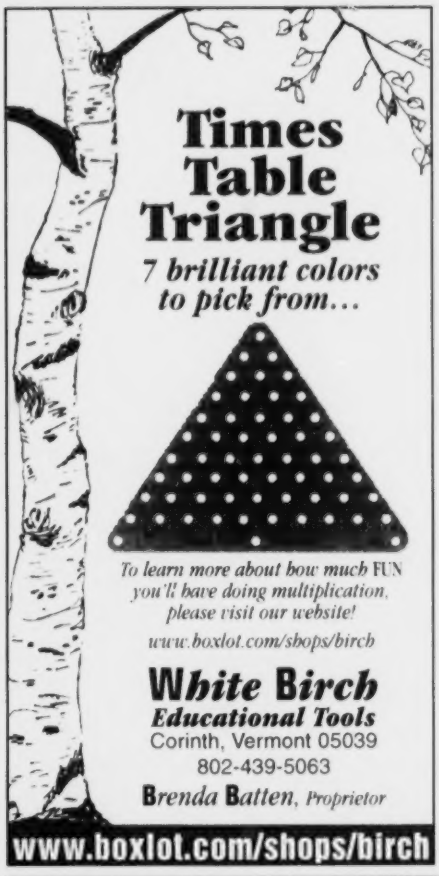
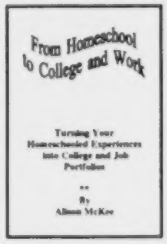


From Homeschool to College and Work

"I can't imagine anyone with children...not being better off from having read ***From Homeschool...***"
John Taylor Gatto, author of ***Dumbing Us Down***

"Highly recommended for high school children who aren't doing things in a traditional manner."
Mary Hood, author of ***The Relaxed Homeschool***


From Homeschool to College and Work
Turning Your Homeschooled Experiences into College and Job Portfolios
By
Alison McKee

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tors, broadcasters, parents, grandparents, and children." The CMN organizes regional meetings and an annual national gathering at which people share songs and ideas about children's music. They also publish a newsletter called *Pass It On!* which includes scores of songs (some by children), interviews with performers and teachers, and other news and information about children's music. For information: The Children's Music Network, PO Box 1341, Evanston IL 60204-1342; 847-733-8003.

The Fun of Barbershopping

Manoj Padki (MA) writes:

I read "Making Music in the Community" (GWS #122) with great interest, and it prodded me to write about barbershopping, something I have meant to do for a long time. I sing barbershop music with the Granite Statesmen Chorus of Nashua, New Hampshire. Barbershopping is a uniquely American style of 4-part a capella (no instruments, only human voices) music. Today, in addition to the society for men (the intentionally pretentious-sounding Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of BarberShop Quartet Singing in America), there are two parallel societies for women (Sweet Adelines International and Harmony Incorporated).

I have always thought that barbershopping embodies the essential principles of self-directed learning. There is no formal training or diploma required. You learn from a mentor, someone a couple of steps ahead of you. You learn as much as your talents, time, and inclination allow. You can compete at various levels if you want to. In other words, there is only as much pressure as you put on yourself.

Like all community activities, barbershopping imposes no age restrictions. If you can carry your part, you can join. For example, in my 75-man chorus, the youngest member is 15 and the oldest is 78. It is also a great family activity. We have three father-son and two brother pairs in our chorus.

Once you become proficient enough to carry your part by yourself, you can join or form a quartet. Then as you get better, you can go out and perform at various local events, like weddings, fundraisers, parties. There are many quartets around who sing at gigs and earn money. There are also opportunities to cut your own albums.

I would highly encourage homeschoolers to visit (and maybe even join) your local barbershop chorus. You will find a bunch of enthusiastic and talented people, and have a lot of fun. To find out the closest chapter to you, here is contact information: SPEBSQSA: 1-800-876-SING or www.spebsqsa.org; Sweet Adelines International: 1-800-992-7464 or www.sweetadelineintl.org; Harmony Inc.: 1-888-871-7762 or www.harmonyinc.org ◆

Spanish Immersion

Judy Garvey (ME) writes:

Our boys are 17 and 20 and have spent a lot of time during their teenage years in independent apprenticeships, traveling, and varying educational experiences, often away from home. For example, our 17-year-old had a great three-month experience at Rancho de Espanol, a small Spanish-language immersion experience in Costa Rica. All-inclusive price for homestay with three meals a day plus four hours of private tutoring was $990 per month. The academic part was fun, according to our son, who has never been into academics. He chose to hang out with Costa Ricans almost exclusively, and, also, the homestay family did not speak any English. The result of all this was that he came home speaking fluent Spanish, and had also learned grammar and reading of the language.

The director of the school, Enrique Rosales, was extremely helpful and is accessible on email. The town is near public transportation, so our son could travel throughout the area. I think this would work for younger teens as well. It's a very safe town with lots of support.

To reach Rancho de Espanol, email rancho@sol.racsa.co.cr or call 506-438-0071. ◆

JOHN HOLT'S BOOKSTORE

1999 Catalog

Books for learners of all ages, in and out of school

The Homeschooling Book of Answers
The 88 Most Important Questions Answered by Homeschooling's Most Respected Voices
Linda Dobson
Un-Jobbing
The Adult Liberation Handbook
Stories to Share Pocket
Tales Kids Can Tell
The Power of Mindful Learning
Ellen J. Langer

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Dear Reader,

Teaching and learning are often more art than science. We have arranged this special version of our catalog of unusual learning materials and our magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*, to help you appreciate the art of education, to help you see how teaching is much more than cramming information into students' minds, and learning is much more than passing tests. Common questions and answers about homeschooling are printed throughout this catalog, and as you read about our selections I hope you will sense that learning is a much broader and exciting topic than most people think. As publisher and a homeschooler, I make sure that we choose only books and materials that we enjoy using. However, every year we discover far more than we can sell in this catalog, and I urge you to subscribe to *Growing Without Schooling* (p. 3) for recommendations of other materials you will enjoy, as well as for proven ideas of what you can do to help your children learn.

Enjoy your reading!

Patrick Farenga

PLEASE NOTE: We will not automatically be packing this catalog GWS issue in each order you get from us as we have done in the past. If you want additional free copies of this special issue for yourself or friends, please request them on the order form, p. 16.

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"Love your GWS site... I like the idea of a more natural, informal, developmental approach to education."— T.R., CA

"I really love and appreciate your selection of books. I'm literally reading my way through the catalog. Thanks for your work!"—P.B., NJ

"I love the conference tapes I purchased!"— L.M., WA

"Thank you people very much for GWS—it's great to read of other people who think the way I do about learning... I read *How Children Learn* (see p. 12) about six years ago and it has definitely changed our family's way of life."—C.W., WA

"I cling to your magazine like a life-line. It gives me a boost whenever I feel guilty about not making my four children do lots of textbook work."
—G.M., Canada

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— A.B., NC

For more books by schoolteachers that can help you at home see:
Thomas Armstrong, P. 7; John Gatto, David Guterson, P. 4; James Herndon, P. 8; John Holt, Pp. 8 & 12; Herb Kohl, P. 8

HOMESCHOOLING CONSULTATIONS

In our consultations, which we conduct over the telephone or in person, we draw upon our years of experience and our knowledge of hundreds of families. We use that experience and knowledge to address your concerns. Some of our recent consultations were with parents who were worried that their children weren't motivated to improve their abilities; with parents who wanted to be sure their homeschooling would meet their children's changing needs; with beginning homeschooling families who wish to discuss their fears and concerns. After such a consultation, one mother wrote to us:

"Thanks so much for your enthusiasm and direction. You've helped me clarify things and find courage... Your belief in choosing the homeschooling option back by your real-life observations has been a godsend."

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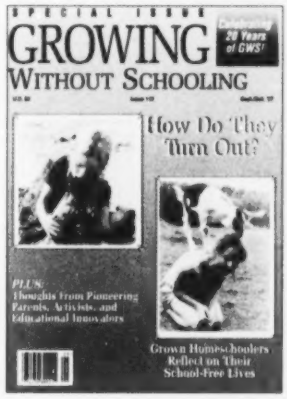

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GWS 20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE. Our celebration of two decades of a magazine, a movement, and a way of learning and living. This special 48-page issue features a section called "How Do They Turn Out? Grown Homeschoolers Reflect on Their School-Free Lives," and many thoughts from pioneering parents, activists, and educational innovators. Readers have called this issue "exceptional," "a treasure," "the perfect thing to show friends and relatives." #1215 $6.00 Postage included.

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SEE P. 9 for **GWS Booklets** of topical material from selected back issues.

THE DIRECTORY ISSUE: Our January-February issue of GWS contains listings for over 2000 homeschooling families, state support groups, helpful private schools, and correspondence materials, in addition to a full issue's worth of stories. #1240 $6.00 Postage included.

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO HOMESCHOOLING, Patrick Farenga. All the information, resources, and guidance you need for starting homeschooling. Easy to read, full of support, and packed with information you can use. Questions and in-depth answers about homeschooling, suggestions for curriculum, record keeping and evaluation, history and research, as well as our complete resource lists of state support groups, correspondence schools, learning materials recommended by readers of GWS, and more! #3296 $10.95

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NEW

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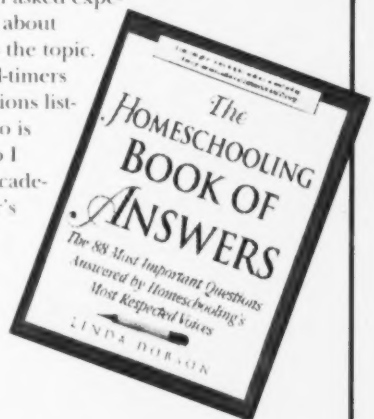
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Sandra Dodd: At home? Why? There are art stores, museums, libraries, theaters, parks, rivers, mountains, beaches, friends' houses, historical sites, factories, construction sites, churches, caves, animal shelters, art galleries, fish hatcheries, foundries, and blacksmiths and...

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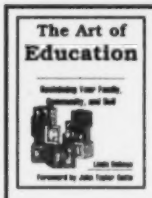

THE ART OF EDUCATION: RECLAIMING YOUR FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SELF, by Linda Dobson. A homeschooling mother's impassioned analysis of schooling with many different solutions to help parents personalize their children's educations. Examines where the government school "system" has led us, and shows how your family can exchange conformity and dependency for personal fulfillment through the natural union of learning and living. #3368 $18.95

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—American Library Association Booklist

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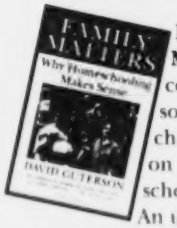
EARNING OUR OWN MONEY: HOMESCHOOLERS 13 AND UNDER TELL THEIR STORIES. Ed. by Susannah Sheffer. Full of inspiring stories about how kids have earned their own money, through some familiar methods and some more unusual ones (making radio commercials, breeding hamsters, running a children's garage sale, teaching art and music). Use their experiences to get some ideas of your own, or just enjoy the writing by young homeschoolers. #1578 $4.50



FAMILY MATTERS: WHY HOMESCHOOLING MAKES SENSE, David Guterson. Research and common sense tell us that high academic and social achievements are far more dependent on children who have secure, nurturing families than on the expertise, length of year, or wealth of any school. This point is made dramatically in this book. An unflinching presentation of the pros and cons of both schools and homeschooling from someone with a stake in both worlds. Added in 1992, it has become one of our most popular books. #1676 $12.00

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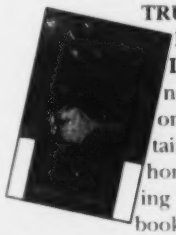
LEARNING WITHOUT A CURRICULUM. 2 60-minute cassettes and all the handouts from Pat Farenga's seminar at the Holt Associates offices. Covers the philosophical, historical, research and educational contexts for learning without curricula. Explores contexts for learning other than schooling's structure and discusses when curricula may be appropriate. #3182 $15.00

TAKING CHARGE THROUGH HOMESCHOOLING, M. Larry & Susan D. Kaseman. The authors' clear presentations of practical alternatives will empower you to find a way to homeschool that works for your family and to deal successfully with school authorities. Very useful for all homeschoolers and a superb analysis of educational trends. #1564 $12.95



TRUST THE CHILDREN: AN ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR HOMESCHOOLING AND ALTERNATIVE LEARNING, Anna Kealoha. A beautifully organized compendium of ideas and activities for anyone interested in working with children. It contains recipes for making art supplies (papier-maché, homemade paints, etc.) and other homemade learning tools, as well as suggestions for activities and books for learning music, letters, numbers, nature, biology, etc. Covers all ages, but best for elementary school age children. #3354 $17.95

HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

Do I need to purchase a curriculum? Where can I get materials if I don't want to use a packaged curriculum?

We emphasize that you don't need a packaged curriculum in order to homeschool successfully. Try our catalog for suggestions of books and materials to use instead. As well, think of the real-life activities, resources and adults available in your community that can help your children learn. Talking with other homeschoolers will give you further ideas (see p. 3, GWS Directory Issue)

One of the biggest advantages of homeschooling is that you don't have to operate exactly as school does or make your child follow the same timetable. However, some families like to have an idea of what is expected of kids in school at various ages. **The Living is Learning Curriculum** Guides (p. 5) provides you with an outline of what is expected in public schools for each grade.

Some families also find that they prefer to start out using a packaged curriculum. Our **Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling** gives names of correspondence schools and curriculum suppliers, and you can investigate which one best fits your family's needs.

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WINNER OF A PARENT'S CHOICE AWARD!

GOOD STUFF: LEARNING TOOLS FOR ALL AGES, Rebecca Rupp. Revised, reformatted, and re-indexed to be even easier to use for 1998! A wide-ranging collection of resources you can order from home, put together by *Home Education Magazine's* popular product review columnist. #3372 $22.95

"Chockfull of resources to expand and enrich children's learning. The author, a biologist and writer of several nature books, wrote the book to inform parents and teachers of the wealth of books, magazines, catalogs, audiovisuals, games, educational toys, and music resources available for motivating children to learn."
—Our Children: The National PTA Magazine

✔ Over 2000 books, materials, companies, internet sites, resources and services are reviewed and referenced in 408 pages

✔ Five indexes. Search by: Author, Title, General Index, Audio-Visual, and Catalog

✔ Tabbed pages so you can easily locate or browse particular categories

✔ New, easier-to-read layout

"A comprehensive reference tool - this book is a must-have!"—*Colorado Home Educator's Assn.*

HOMESCHOOLING SETS

SAVE TIME AND MONEY WITH THESE SPECIALLY SELECTED PACKAGES

1 THINKING ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING SET. To help you explore homeschooling. FAMILY MATTERS (p. 4); TEACH YOUR OWN (p. 12), HOMESCHOOLING IN THE NEWS (available only with this set - $6.95!); GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING (p. 3); a copy of our latest issue.
You can order the above separately for $41.90.
SAVE $16.90 by ordering them together as **#3318 $25.00**

2 YOUNGER HOMESCHOOLING SET. For the elementary school years. HOW CHILDREN LEARN (p. 12); TAKING CHARGE THROUGH HOMESCHOOLING (p. 5); THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO HOMESCHOOLING (p. 3); GWS Sub., 1 yr. 6 issues. (p. 3). You can order the above separately for $60.90.
SAVE $11.90 by ordering them together as **#3238 $49.00**

3 OLDER HOMESCHOOLING SET. For the teenage years. TEEN LIBERATION HANDBOOK (p. 10); AND WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE? (p. 11); REAL LIVES (p. 11); GWS SUBSCRIPTION, 1 yr. 6 issues (p. 3)
You can order the above separately for $79.95
SAVE $11.95 by ordering them together as **Set #3240 $68.00**

"We can imagine and indeed we have had human societies without schools... or any of the institutions which seem so indispensable and permanent a part of modern life... But we cannot even imagine a society without homes, even if these should be no more than tents, or mud huts, or holes in the ground. What I am trying to say, in short, is that our chief educational problem is not to find a way to make homes more like schools. If anything, it is to make schools less like schools."—John Holt, *Teach Your Own*

NEW

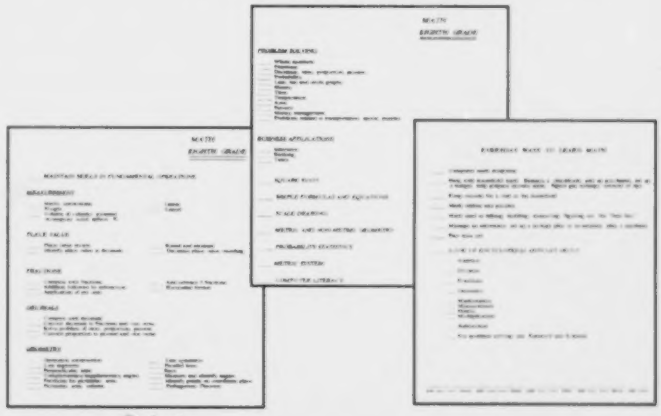
LIVING IS LEARNING

CURRICULUM GUIDES GRADES K - 12

"How do we know if our children are learning what school covers? How do we report unschooling/homeschooling to schools?"

Nancy Plent, the founder of the Unschoolers Network of NJ, compiles the curricular goals for each year of school and translates them into real-life situations unschoolers can relate to. Packed with suggestions for meeting and exceeding these guidelines, these books double as record-keepers to help you organize your children's learning into an "after-the-fact" curriculum that schools can recognize. Compiled from national and state curricular guidelines, these books help you see what is going on in most schools for each grade level. A confidence builder for anyone wondering if they have what it takes to "cover" a year of learning without going to school.

LIVING IS LEARNING GUIDES/K-1	#6005	$15.00
LIVING IS LEARNING GUIDES/2 & 3	#6006	$15.00
LIVING IS LEARNING GUIDES/4 & 5	#6007	$15.00
LIVING IS LEARNING GUIDES/6,7 & 8	#6008	$22.00
LIVING IS LEARNING/High School	#6009	$25.00



Phone orders: (617) 864-3100 Email orders: holtgws@erols.com Fax orders: (617) 864-9235

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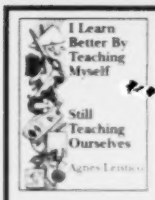


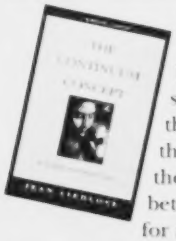
I LEARN BETTER BY TEACHING MYSELF and STILL TEACHING OURSELVES, Agnes Leistico. This new edition combines two popular books under one cover. How a homeschooling mother learned to trust her children—and herself—to learn in new ways from elementary school to high school. These books are especially good for anyone wrestling with the question of "how much structure?" #3366 $19.95

I LEARN BETTER BY TEACHING MYSELF:

"The underlying message in this book is trust in your child. Just as we needed to look at the breastfeeding child to know his needs to nurse, we can trust that our children can direct their own education."—*La Leche League International*

STILL TEACHING OURSELVES:

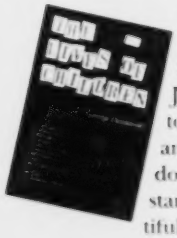
"The Leisticos had difficult school experiences, homeschooled for a few years, and then chose to go back to school. The sections describing the kids' transition back into school are in fact some of the most affirming sections for homeschoolers, because they show how deeply homeschooling can affect a child and how valuable it can be as a healing experience."—*Growing Without Schooling*



THE CONTINUUM CONCEPT, Jean Liedloff. About Liedloff's experience with the Yequana Indians, who raise their infants with almost constant human contact, keeping them in arms until they are ready to explore on their own. Liedloff's thoughts about helping children participate in their culture, and about lessening the conflict between children and adults, are crucial reading for any parent. In a way, this book provides the best answer to the socialization question that everyone asks of homeschoolers. "As important a book as any I have ever read." —John Holt. #226 $13.00

DUMBING US DOWN: THE INVISIBLE CURRICULUM OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING, John T. Gatto. Several essays based on speeches by Gatto about schooling versus education, why we need less school and not more, the seven-lesson schoolteacher, his controversial Teacher of the Year acceptance speech before the NY State Senate, and more. Gatto's rhetoric is incisive - at times cutting - and his unwavering advocacy for homeschooling and all other alternatives to government schools make him a broad-minded rarity in the current crop of school reformers. #1588 $9.95 **SEE P. 9 FOR TAPES BY GATTO.**

EVERYONE IS ABLE: EXPLODING THE MYTH OF LEARNING DISABILITIES, Susannah Sheffer, ed. True stories from parents and LD specialists make us challenge our prevailing ideas about LD and offer alternative ways for helping people learn. Includes a section on LD jargon commonly used in school and what it truly means. #268 $3.95



THE LIVES OF CHILDREN, George Dennison. A deeply inspiring story of a school that worked for kids whom everyone else had given up on. John Holt wrote, "For while I hope that in years to come we may learn much about human growth and development that we do not now know, I doubt that any one book will advance our understanding as much as this one." Don't miss this beautifully written, classic work. #1496 $4.95

"*GWS* (p. 3) has been the absolute BEST resource for information, encouragement, food for thought, ways of looking at issues of learning! I think you are all doing an excellent job. I also very much appreciate that you forward letters sent to you by readers. I have received some wonderful letters and had some good opportunities to share information and resources with people who wrote to me after you published one of my letters."—L.C., VA

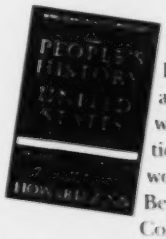
INNOVATIVE LEARNING MATERIALS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

THE FIRST HONEST BOOK ABOUT LIES, Jonni Kincher. The book is full of activities and examples and things to think about. It is not a book to borrow, read once and then return; it's one you'll want to dip into again and again as you explore its many possibilities. From Susannah Sheffer's review in GWS:

Who would have thought that lies could provoke so much reflection and discussion? But it makes sense. It's fun to know when we're being fooled, when our senses deceive us or play tricks on us. It's interesting, and ultimately empowering, to learn how advertisers try to shape our opinions, how numbers can mislead us, how historical facts aren't always facts at all. And when it comes to human relations, I've found that young people are acutely aware of when they're being lied to and of what makes them feel they have to lie.

The First Honest Book About Lies covers all this and more. It says "Ages 13 and up," but I don't believe it (see what healthy skepticism the book has encouraged in me?). There are activities and ideas in here that younger kids could easily enjoy with older ones or with adults.

I've used this book twice as a springboard for discussions with a group of older homeschoolers. Once, we focused on some of the book's more personal questions about how to tell when you're being lied to and what situations make you feel the need to lie. Another time we moved into questions of medical ethics and choices people made about lying at crucial points in history (in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s, and in Nazi Germany in the 1940s). The subject of lying can lead to an incredible amount of discussion. #3302 $12.95

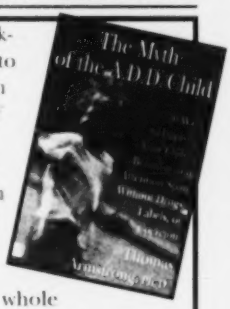


PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, Howard Zinn. Since the movie *Good Will Hunting* appeared this book has gained in popularity, but we've been selling it proudly for years. Teens in particular marvel at how interesting the book is and wonder why they never learned this stuff in school. Beginning with how the Native Americans reacted to Columbus's arrival and taking us all the way through the late twentieth century, Howard Zinn gives us our country's history from the perspective of people whose voices we don't usually hear. This is a book to inspire discussion, argument, further reading, and perhaps even social and political action. #1704 $18.00

"*A People's History of the U.S.* is the talk of the bay right now!"

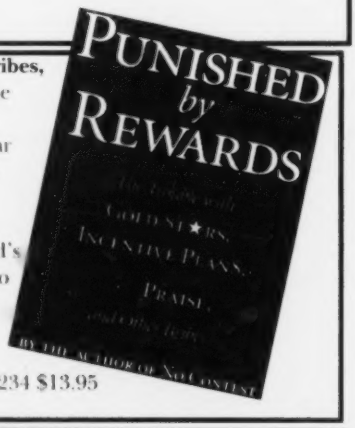
—S.W., Edna Bay, AK

Mail orders only to: John Holt's Bookstore, PO Box 8006, Walled Lake, MI 48391-8006



THE MYTH OF THE A.D.D. CHILD, Thomas Armstrong. An astute challenge to the accepted understanding of Attention Deficit Disorder. Armstrong does not deny that some kids have a harder time keeping still or paying attention, but he looks carefully at all possible explanations for this behavior. Even more important, it's an extremely useful handbook, offering 50 ways to help children without drugs, labels, or coercion. Many sound like the recommendations homeschoolers have been making for years: "Provide Hands-On Activities," "Offer Your Child Real-Life Tasks to Do," "Give Your Child Choices."

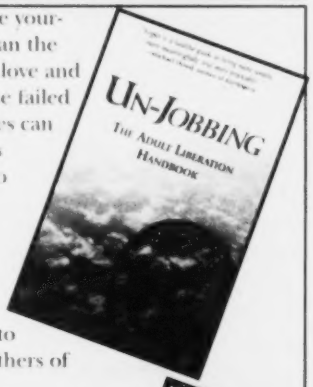
From our interview with Thomas Armstrong in GWS:
"Kids are who are labeled A.D.D. are those who can't or won't put up with the situation in school. And that may not be such a bad thing, because they're telling us: this isn't working. They're harbingers of whatever we need to reform in our schools. If we take the cue from them rather than seeing them as the source of the problem, we'll be better off. ...It would seem to me that homeschooling would be tailor-made for the child who is having trouble in the worksheet wasteland and getting slapped with the A.D.D. label. ...To me, the value of homeschooling is that it gives the parent and child a chance to make a fresh start, to have a whole different way of looking at learning and educating, and to treat the child in a positive way."
#3460 $13.95



PUNISHED BY REWARDS: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes, Alfie Kohn. *From our interview with Alfie Kohn in GWS:* "Children are so intrinsically motivated to make sense of their world, to play with letters, numbers, and ideas, that you can't stop them very easily. Eventually we do stop them, by getting them hooked on approval and grades, or getting them to fear some kind of punishment or disapproval. But the amazing self-fulfilling prophecy here is that after rewards and punishments have done their damage, and intrinsic motivation evaporates, we turn around and say, 'You see! If we don't use carrots and sticks, they won't want to do anything.'"

Thus Kohn's discussion is relevant to long-term homeschoolers who want to preserve their child's intrinsic motivation, and—perhaps even more so—to new homeschoolers who are wondering how to help a child recover that inner direction. What makes the book so valuable is that after demonstrating the harmful effects of rewards, Kohn describes, very concretely, the many other alternatives available. If you've ever said to yourself, "How do I motivate my children?", or are interested in thinking about the long-term effects of how we deal with children, this book is essential reading. #3234 $13.95

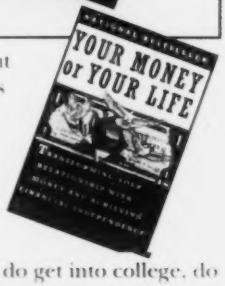
NEW



UN-JOBBING: THE ADULT LIBERATION HANDBOOK, by Michael Fogler. Adults, free yourselves, too! Michael Fogler, a homeschooling father, says that adult life can be more than the drudgery of working just for a paycheck. Our working lives can connect with what we love and believe, and we can learn to live on less money. In this book, Fogler talks about how he failed to find full-time work and doesn't regret it now; what he does instead; how other families can rethink their working lives and their perception of what's economically necessary. Families thinking about giving up a second income, single-parent homeschoolers, young people looking ahead to adulthood - all will find this a provocative and useful book. #6011 $12.00

From our interview with Michael Fogler in GWS:

"In school, a child begins to feel, 'This school owns me, there's so little time left that belongs to me.' Well, the same thing often happens with jobs. What I'm trying to say is, let's have every minute belong to you. In our society, it takes a considerable amount of homework and self-reflection and support from others of like mind in order to do this."



YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE, Dominguez & Robbin. A fascinating analysis of our culture's assumptions about economic well-being and how adopting these assumptions without questions prevents people from living the lives they would really like. Acknowledges that budgeting doesn't work for most people, and offers many new ways to change our relationship to money. Excellent for families who want to homeschool but are stymied by financial pressure. Presents a plan for taking control of your life and using it for what you truly value. #3172 $12.95

HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

I love the idea of homeschooling, but my spouse/parents/other relatives/friends are skeptical about the idea. What can I do?

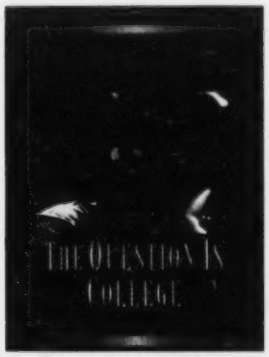
This can be one of the biggest challenges a homeschooling family faces. Remember that many concerns about homeschooling are based on ignorance or misinformation. For example a friend may worry that your child is being deprived of access to group experiences, not realizing that homeschoolers can participate in Scouts, community groups, homeschooling groups, etc. A skeptical relative may fear that this is simply your outrageous idea, not knowing about the thousands of successful homeschoolers who have gone before you. Many skeptics are reassured when they learn that homeschoolers do have friends, do get into college, do have a wide range of learning opportunities. When you have done some reading about homeschooling you will be able to select the passages that best address your critic's concerns. Some people are also reassured by meeting other homeschoolers or listening to talks, workshops, radio interviews.

Remember, too, that it can take time to feel comfortable with homeschooling, and sometimes you may simply have to live with a friend's or relative's uncertainty for a while.Often people report to us that with time, as skeptics have a chance to see how homeschooling works, their fears lessen.

A LIFE WORTH LIVING: A VIDEO TRIBUTE TO JOHN HOLT

To cap our 20th anniversary conference we created a show from the slides, videos, photos, tapes and writings of John Holt. We have now transferred it to videotape and enhanced it with new footage. It covers Holt's early career as social reformer and private school teacher, to famous author and school reformer, to unschooler and homeschool advocate. Filled with Holt's own words from interviews and lectures over the years. *A Life Worth Living* is a perfect introduction to one of the most innovative thinkers about education. 22 minute VHS. #3476 $15.00

INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION SERIES



NEW **THE QUESTION IS COLLEGE: ON FINDING AND DOING WORK YOU LOVE,** by Herbert Kohl. This book was much loved by homeschoolers (and many others) when it first came out in 1989, and we're thrilled that it's now back in print with a new preface by the author. It's for teenagers who aren't sure that they want to go to college at all, and for their parents (especially those who may be worried about the no-college choice). As the subtitle suggests, it's also about finding work you love: the second half of the book is a handbook for figuring out what kind of work you love and deciding how to pursue it. Here are a few chapter titles to give you an idea of the depth and breadth of this book's exploration: "Several Myths About the Virtues of a College Education," "The Importance of Parental Support," "Dignified Life's Work," "Dealing with Anxieties About Your Children's Future." #3480 $15.95

From THE QUESTION IS COLLEGE:

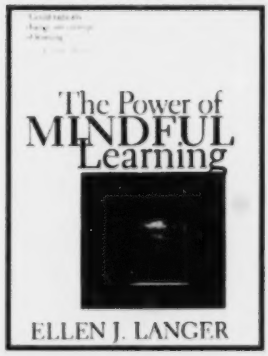
"Questions about life after high school work their way into the heart of a family. Over the past five years they have certainly occupied our family as our three children prepared to graduate from high school, graduated, and made choices about what they would like to do with their lives. I worried that if the wrong decision were made they would suffer. I now feel that my notion of life after high school was inappropriate and realize how much more there is to do in the world than taking the secure way of delaying life for four years in a 'regular' college."

FREEDOM AND BEYOND, John Holt. New foreword and updated appendix! Many of the questions with which homeschoolers continually wrestle are addressed in this book, in Holt's clear, eloquent, and comprehensive style. What's the difference between "structured" and "unstructured"? Between coercive and natural authority? What does discipline really mean? What happens when kids who are not used to making choices about their learning suddenly get this opportunity? What tensions arise, and how can we help? Holt's exploration of these questions would be enough to make the book extremely valuable, but there's more—Holt also offers a cogent analysis of why schooling cannot cure poverty and what deschooling would mean for the poor. Fascinating, important reading. #3278 $14.95

HOW TO SURVIVE IN YOUR NATIVE LAND, James Herndon. Herbert Kohl, author of *36 Children*, says, "*How to Survive in Your Native Land* is a literary treasure, simultaneously a beat novel, a great feat of storytelling, and a storehouse of educational wisdom. Herndon shows us, with great wit and good spirits, how good education can emerge in the most unexpected circumstances and caring teachers can transform lives." #3464 $13.95

THE WAY IT SPOZED TO BE, James Herndon. We all know what's "spozed" to happen in school, but what happens when one new English teacher doesn't follow the rules? In Herndon's classroom, what happened was that students began learning and caring about learning, often for the first time. And what happened was that the teacher got fired. This account of teaching is not easily forgotten. #3462 $13.95

WHAT DO I DO MONDAY?, John Holt. This is Holt's classic answer to teachers who asked, "How can I put all your ideas into practice myself, with my kids?" The book contains hundreds of things to do or try – "measuring speed," "measuring strength," "fractions," "recording talk," "writing for ourselves," "writing for others," and much more. Also a hard-hitting look at what's wrong with marking and grading, at what can help troubled children, and at the difference between "teacher as cop" and "teacher as guide." Holt wrote that of all his books, he felt that this was the one homeschoolers would find most practical. #3280 $15.95



NEW **THE POWER OF MINDFUL LEARNING,** by Ellen Langer. Practice makes perfect? Wrong answers are bad? Ellen Langer doesn't think so. In fact, she challenges so many of society's most accepted notions about learning that we knew we had to add this book to our catalog. Langer praises doubt and uncertainty, thinks people have fun when they're learning something new, and thinks kids with attention-deficit disorder aren't distracted, they're just paying attention to something else. This book will have you thinking, talking, and seeing things in new ways. #6001 $11.00

From our interview with Ellen Langer in GWS:

"Wrong answers are correct in some contexts. The person who stated the wrong answer stated it because of some way they put the information together that made sense to them. You want to understand how they came to that answer, which you're not going to do if you just dismiss it as wrong."

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GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

1999 CONFERENCE TAPES

RECORDED AT EISNER CAMP, SEPT. 25 - 27 1999

ITEM	SPEAKER	TITLE
3743	Joe Kelly and Nancy Gruver	Share the Power
3749	Cafi Cohen	Self-Directed Learning
3752	Susannah Sheffer	Helping Children to Write
3764	Moderator: Susannah Sheffer	Panel Discussion of Parent/Child Pairs
3765	Pat Farenga & Susannah Sheffer	Pat Farenga & Susannah Sheffer Q & A
3750	Susan Kaseman	Living With Children 24 Hours a Day
3751	Joshua Hornick	Doing Science Instead of Just Studying It
3753	Loretta Heuer	Staying Connected During the Teen Years & Beyond

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING
20TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE TAPES

The following cassette tapes were recorded at our 20th Anniversary Conference, August 8 - 10, 1997 at the Westin Hotel, Waltham, MA

ITEM	SPEAKER	TITLE
3408	Micki & David Colfax	Homeschooling, Children and the World of Real Work
3420	Cafi Cohen	Decompressions: Beginning Homeschooling with an older student
3428	John T. Gatto	"Bianca, you animal, shut up!"
3409	S. Sheffer (moderator)	Grown-Up Homeschoolers Panel
3429	Micki & David Colfax	Question and Answer Session
3419	John T. Gatto	The Guerrilla Curriculum (2 tapes, $16)
3414	Alan & Michelle Shaw	Living, Working and Learning Together as a Family
3426	Susannah Sheffer	Myths of Unschooling: What Freedom Really Means
3435	S. Kaseman & S. Evans	Loving Approaches to Learning to Read
3422	Amy & David Mantell	Unschooling Math: It's Elementary
3434	David Mantell	Unschooling Math: Algebra and Beyond
3423	Madalene Murphy	Growing Writers
3433	Loretta Heuer	Alternative Assessments for Homeschoolers

PRICES FOR ALL TAPES: 1 Tape = $10

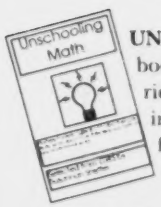
2-5 Tapes = $8 each

Set of 6 = $45

Full 20th Anniversary conference set #3438 (25 tapes in 2 albums) #3438 $170

GWS BOOKLETS

Collections of some of our best stories, on three of our most-requested topics.



UNSCHOOLING MATH. We carry some great math books in our catalog, but when you're hungry for stories about how homeschoolers are learning math in interesting and surprising ways, there's no substitute for these GWS stories. Covers all ages. #3470 $4.95

LIFE AFTER HOMESCHOOLING. Detailed accounts of the college admissions process and of alternatives to college, all from homeschoolers' perspectives. These stories about homeschoolers moving into the wider world are among our most popular. #3474 $4.95

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO HOMESCHOOL. Leaving school is the first step, but adjusting to a new way of learning and living is an ongoing process. These stories—several by young people themselves—take you inside that process and offer reassurance and insight. #3472 $4.95

SPECIAL OFFER! Purchase all 3 booklets and save $2.85! Order Booklet Set #3482, $12.00

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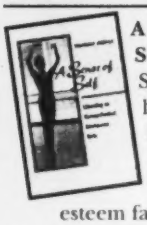


A SENSE OF SELF: LISTENING TO HOME-SCHOOLED ADOLESCENT GIRLS, Susannah Sheffer. "I like how I've learned, I like who I am, I like what I know." "I know what I think and feel and I have my beliefs and I don't let myself get pushed around." Much publicity and attention has been given to the reports claiming adolescent girls' self-esteem fades in their teenage years. But the statements quoted above are those of adolescent girls—homeschooled girls, whose voices have not yet been considered in the current debate. Why are these girls able to hold onto the strengths they had as children? How are they able to resist challenges to their sense of self and how can their parents best help them? In this book, Susannah Sheffer analyzes the 55 in-depth interviews she conducted with homeschooled girls ages 11–16. Nancy Gruver writes in the foreword, "Susannah's research ... presents a different picture of girls at adolescence, a picture that is hopeful." NOW IN PAPERBACK! #3376 $15.95

"The author presents positive examples of young women making decisions and standing by them based on what they've learned and what they believe. The words of the young women in Sheffer's book inspire and prod educators and parents to consider the role education plays in girls' development."

—*Harvard Educational Review.*

"I think homeschooling can be a great solution for adolescent girls who need to run towards something they love. I'm so glad *A Sense of Self* is out there to tell the stories."

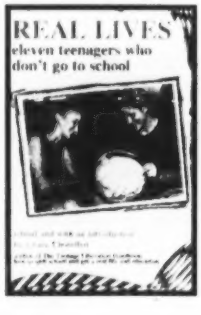
—Mary Pipher, author of *Reviving Ophelia*

THE TEENAGE LIBERATION HANDBOOK: HOW TO QUIT SCHOOL AND GET A REAL LIFE AND EDUCATION, Grace Llewellyn. NEW 1998-99 EDITION! We've gotten so many letters and calls saying, "I've just finished *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* and it totally changed my life and the way I think" that we've lost count. This handbook of self-discovery and possibility has led teenagers to leave school, long-time homeschoolers to re-evaluate and re-invigorate their lives, parents to understand their teenagers and get excited about their own learning, and schoolteachers to question the institution they're immersed in. Equal parts inspiration and practical suggestion, the book shows teenagers what they can do through hundreds of examples of what other teens have done. Shows how adolescence can be a time of exploration and meaningful work rather than just a matter of waiting for the bell to ring. Fascinating and useful reading for teens and parents. The new edition contains lots of updated information (including information about homeschooling abroad), many new examples, and, in some cases, Grace Llewellyn's latest thoughts. #1630 $19.00

"Every autodidact should get down on their knees in gratitude to Grace Llewellyn for her commitment to education in the true sense of the word. Every house that has a teenager should also have a copy of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*. ... Important and magical." – Kendall Hailey, author of *The Day I Became an Autodidact*

TEENAGE HOMESCHOOLERS: COLLEGE OR NOT?, Patrick Farenga. How do homeschoolers get into the college of their choice? How do they find work without having high school or college degrees? These and other questions get answered in this new booklet with references. #3294 $2.95

FREEDOM CHALLENGE: AFRICAN AMERICAN HOMESCHOOLERS, edited by Grace Llewellyn. Essays by and interviews with 16 children, teenagers, mothers, and fathers. Important discussion about homeschooling as a continuation of the Civil Rights movement and about the horrors that African-American children (especially boys) face in schools. Material on young children teaching themselves to read, on setting up classes and networks for homeschoolers, and on homeschooling with little money or as a single-parent family. An important and inspiring collection. Photos. #3316 $16.95



REAL LIVES: ELEVEN TEENAGERS WHO DON'T GO TO SCHOOL, Grace Llewellyn These first-hand accounts, accompanied by black and white photos, show the wide variety of worthwhile things teens can do if given the opportunity. Instead of going to school Rebecca works at homeless shelters; Vallie answers questions at a marine science center; Amanda performs with a violin quintet; Patrick designs video games... and more!

Three of the writers left school as teenagers and offer valuable insights about the transition from school to homeschooling. ("I was not quite used to the idea of not doing something measurably valuable at all times," writes Patrick, "and I did suffer a bit of guilt.") A wonderful appendix asks parents and kids to answer the question, "Do you have to be a genius to unschool?" Their answers are both reassuring and inspiring. Here's one from Kyla Wetherell, to whet your appetite: "Unschooling allows both 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' students to search for real, meaningful achievement. ... Many of the people I know who have recently quit school to get on with real living were considered failures by the school system." #1772 $17.00

AN EVENING WITH GRACE LLEWELLYN. Even though you're homeschooling, school's ways of thinking and doing things may still influence your life to a large degree. How do you get schooling out of your head? Grace discusses this and other subjects in a fascinating talk presented in Cambridge in 1995. A short talk by Susannah Sheffer about her research on homeschooled adolescent girls starts the tape, and a dynamic question-and-answer session with both Grace and Susannah ends it. 2 60 - minute cassette tapes. #3258 $15.00

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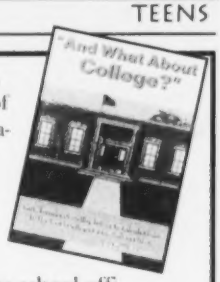


AND WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE? How Homeschooling leads to admissions to the best colleges and universities. Cafi Cohen. How the author helped her two homeschooled children apply to and get accepted by the colleges of their choice. Useful ideas for everyone thinking about college, but especially for those with nontraditional educations. 176 pages. #3364 $18.95

"The indisputable book for college-bound homeschoolers. If your child is a teenager and thinking about college, this is the book to get—and the younger your teen, the better."—David & Micki Colfax, authors of *Homeschooling For Excellence* and *Hard Times In Paradise*

- ✓ College Admissions For Everyone: Practical Advice from those who think out of the box!
- ✓ Conversational, not didactic in tone
- ✓ Lots of samples and examples
- ✓ Homebrewed transcripts and homeschool course descriptions
- ✓ Sample curricula and record-keeping
- ✓ Application essays
- ✓ Cover letters and resumes
- ✓ Applying to a service academy
- ✓ College planning checklist
- ✓ On-line resources & lists of selective colleges that have accepted homeschoolers
- ✓ How to present real-life learning in terms school officials will understand
- ✓ Finding the right college for your child

"Your book is a life and sanity saver…"

—A. G., OH

"You have placed in our hands something well-written and valuable."—C. D., TN

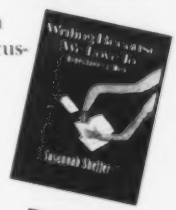
"I'm a 16-year-old homeschooler and I just finished the application process… I'm recommending your book to every teen homeschooler I know who's considering college… Thanks for writing it!"—L. D. M., NJ

"If you've got a high schooler destined for college, you'll want *And What About College?* by your side for the next few years." — Gayle Graham in *Homeschooling Today Magazine*

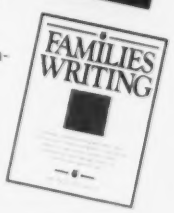
"Highly recommended." — Mary Pride in *The Big Book of Home Learning*

INNOVATIVE LEARNING MATERIALS FOR WRITING

WRITE AWAY: A FRIENDLY GUIDE FOR TEENAGE WRITERS, Peter Stillman. This book speaks directly to young people and offers suggestions and ideas that don't feel like school writing exercises. The author's own love of writing comes through on every page, and his mix of serious commitment and wonderful sense of humor (including great cartoons!) makes this the perfect guide for teenagers just out of school and long-time homeschoolers as well. Helpful advice about spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing in the context of a deeper exploration of how to write with beauty and power. Parents can't resist picking it up either! #3254 $14.95



WRITING BECAUSE WE LOVE TO: HOMESCHOOLERS AT WORK, by Susannah Sheffer. About Sheffer's work with homeschoolers aged 10–15. This book is a close look at how to help kids with their writing; it is also a more general discussion of how self-directed learning actually works and what the appropriate role is for the adult helper. The chapters on the apprenticeship model, on choosing teachers, and on using teachers are about much more than writing—they are useful to anyone interested in homeschooling or in how kids learn. #1573 $12.95



FAMILIES WRITING, Peter Stillman. **BACK IN PRINT! NEW SECOND EDITION.** Offers a vast array of ideas. Peter Stillman is a skillful writer himself, so all his suggestions are grounded in actual experiences; he never asks you to do something that he wouldn't consider doing himself. Furthermore, the book isn't just about writing; it's about strengthening family bonds and using writing to preserve family connections and family memories. It serves the family that already loves writing and the family that feels the need of some ideas, some guidance, and some reassurance. #6010 $18.50

HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

Does homeschooling work for teenagers? Can homeschoolers get into college?

Yes, and yes. More and more teenagers are leaving school and becoming homeschoolers. There are also increasing numbers of teenagers who have homeschooled their entire lives. These kids are studying subjects in depth, learning from apprenticeships, work, and travel. They enjoy the independence of homeschooling and the time to discover what they really love to do. Homeschoolers now attend many of the selective colleges and state universities, and others are pursuing work or apprenticeships instead of going to college. In addition to the books on these two pages, see "Life After Homeschooling" on p. 9.

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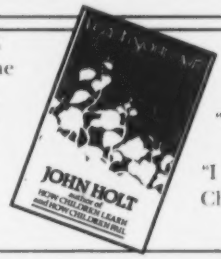
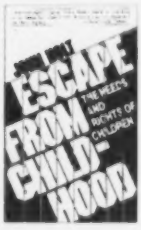


TEACH YOUR OWN: A HOPEFUL PATH FOR EDUCATION, by John Holt. A new edition of the home education classic. First published in 1981, *Teach Your Own* has helped thousands of people from all over the world to start homeschooling. Holt's timeless insights into how children learn and his perspective on homeschooling as being completely different than just school at home, make this book more timely, useful, and important than ever. #3378 $16.95

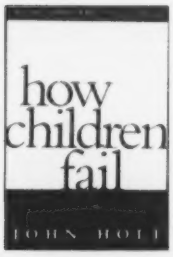
"Mr. Holt is in a class with Piaget."—*NY Review of Books*

"I urge every responsible parent to read this work."—Joseph Chilton Pierce

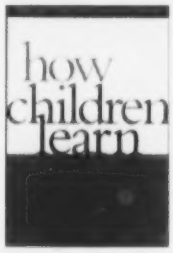
THE EDUCATION OF JOHN HOLT, Mel Allen. An accurate and warm biographical and character portrait of John, published in *Yankee Magazine*, 1981. #252 $3.00



ESCAPE FROM CHILDHOOD. The case for treating children like real people, not pets and slaves, and for making available to them adult rights & responsibilities. One of John's most controversial books, its logic and startling conclusions will make you think twice about "childhood." #262 $9.95



HOW CHILDREN FAIL. This classic book, which has deeply affected many people's lives, looks at what school is actually like for children and how much of what is done in school prevents, rather than encourages, real learning. Read it to keep from making the mistakes schools make and to follow the fascinating development of Holt's thinking. If you read the book when it first came out, this edition contains much new material, including Holt's second thoughts about his earlier observations. #3282 $12.00

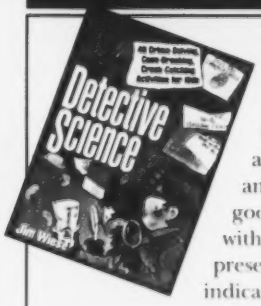


HOW CHILDREN LEARN. Holt is a master at looking closely at young children and understanding how their minds work. This loving and insightful look at the way children learn challenges traditional assumptions and underlies all of Holt's later thinking, including his support for homeschooling. #3284 $12.00

More books by John Holt are on page 8. Holt's thinking about education goes far beyond describing teaching and learning techniques, as this passage describes. This is a quote from Holt's FREEDOM AND BEYOND, (p. 8):

"All I have said so far seems to assume two things, which most people believe. The first is that in a normal or proper state of affairs, except for emergencies and disasters, people will get their incomes through jobs. The second is that it is possible, at least in theory, and in practice if we could only find the right way to do it, for a modern economy to provide enough good jobs so that everyone will have an adequate income. But I don't believe either of these things, and would like to take some space to say why, and what I think needs to be done about it..."

INNOVATIVE LEARNING MATERIALS FOR SCIENCE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES



DETECTIVE SCIENCE: 40 CRIME-SOLVING, CASE-BREAKING, CROOK-CATCHING ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS, Jim Wiese. Learn how to lift fingerprints off objects, use chemistry to analyze evidence, simulate voiceprints, and much more. The science activities are good to use with your own kids, as well as with groups. Some of these tasks require the presence of an adult, which the book clearly indicates; others can be done by children on their own. #3352 $12.95

MEG MACKINTOSH Solve-It-Yourself Mysteries. Series by Lucinda Landon. Meg Mackintosh is an 11-or 12-year-old girl with a determined and resourceful attitude. Her adventures are believable and well-paced, the characters are interesting, and the text fuses pictures, maps, and puzzles together in a clever way. At points in the narrative the story breaks and you are asked a question, like "How Does Meg Know?" Discussing possible answers and supporting them with evidence from the story and the pictures, then reading Meg's answer when you turn the page, will provide you and your kids with lots of reading and discussion... but most of all, these books are fun.

EACH BOOK IN THE MEG MACKINTOSH SERIES IS $4.95

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The Curious Whale Watch #3344
The Medieval Castle #3342
Camp Creepy #3350
The Locked Library #3348
The Mystery at the Soccer Match #3466

THE DETECTIVE SET. Explore science, logic and reasoning, art, map reading and more through a variety of interests and styles. Get all six Meg Mackintosh mystery books and Detective Science at a special price - Save $2.65! #3398 $40.00

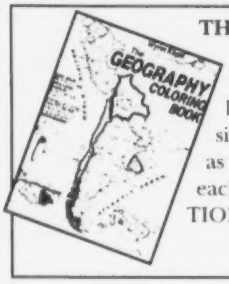
217

SWALLOWS & AMAZONS, Arthur Ransome. The first book in this classic series. John Holt: "...like opening a window and getting a delicious breath of fresh air. Beginning a Ransome book, we find ourselves in a world full of energetic, serious, capable people, young and old, doing meaningful work that they enjoy and believe in..." A homeschooling parent: "My sons (7 1/2 and 6) loved *Swallows and Amazons*... the older is now reading it on his own and also favorite parts to his brother. They have been camping out in our yard the past few nights..." #744 $14.95

SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS VIDEOS

THE BIG SIX and its companion **COOT CLUB,** adapted from books of the same titles, are set on the lakes and waterways of England during the 1930s. Both feature the same cast of interesting characters, led by six children who become fast friends through their mutual love of wildlife and all things nautical. Gorgeous scenery and good acting make these videos a family treat. Produced by the BBC. Both are 90 minute VHS. **THE BIG SIX** #3272 $19.95; **COOT CLUB** #3274 #$19.95

MATERIAL WORLD, Peter Menzel. Combine math with geography, social studies and history! Use this book as a photo journey through the lives and homes of 30 "average" families in every corner of the globe, filled with fascinating statistics and text about the countries, the featured families, and their possessions. This economic geography challenges us to consider what life looks like to people in totally different circumstances and vastly different levels of material wealth. Charts and tables are elegantly worked into the text. Hardcover. #3300 $35.00



THE GEOGRAPHY COLORING BOOK, Wynn Kapit. Over 50 fascinating outline maps of every region of the U.S. and world, plus much informative text on each facing page. Political maps, physical maps, and many thematic maps (climate, population, etc.) Nice bonuses are sections on plate tectonics and comparing countries' sizes. Coloring enables you to reach an unusual level of concentration and awareness as you work. You may need a copy for each family member! NEW SECOND EDITION! #1680 $14.95

This is but one of the many size comparisons you can color and discuss with your children as you learn how large Africa is.

HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

What about the social life of kids who learn at home?

There are many ways for homeschoolers to meet other kids. Studies have shown that homeschoolers have a more positive self-concept than their schooled peers. They are more likely to have friends of different ages and to be free of the cliqueish, exclusive behavior so common in school. Here are just some of the ways that homeschoolers meet and socialize with other young people: In the neighborhood, in church, in Scouts, in 4-H, through community sports teams, in community theatre, in music or dance or gymnastics or art classes, through participation in some school activities, through homeschool support groups and activity clubs.

A teenage girl who left school and became a homeschooler wrote to GWS, "I think that homeschooling has allowed me to develop my social skills a lot more than school did." A mother told us about a local group for teenage homeschoolers, in which the kids have gone to museums, studied biology together, and done all sorts of other activities. She said, "The kids are meeting people from many different backgrounds, with many different kinds of life experiences, and the friendships really cross those lines." Homeschooling does not make kids socially deprived.

What kinds of people homeschool?

All kinds. Homeschoolers live in the country, city, suburbs, small towns. Some are single-parent families. Some run family businesses, and some parents combine working outside the home with homeschooling. The homeschooling movement is growing increasingly diverse as people of many religions, philosophies, and ethnic backgrounds choose to homeschool. In addition to several groups and publications specifically for Christian homeschoolers, there are groups and newsletters addressing the concerns of Jewish homeschoolers, Muslim homeschoolers, and homeschoolers of color. See *The Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling,* (p. 3) for addresses of these and other groups. See the book *Freedom Challenge* (p. 10), for an in-depth look at the experiences of African-American homeschoolers.

How many homeschoolers are there in the U.S.?

Nobody knows for sure, but a researcher estimated 350,000 in the early 1990's and we guess that there are at least 1,000,000 children being homeschooled in 1998. Not all states require homeschoolers to register with a central location, but in states where such figures are available, it is clear that the number of homeschoolers has grown substantially over the years.

Is homeschooling legal?

Yes, homeschooling is legal in all fifty states and in Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France, and probably elsewhere as well.

I'm interested in homeschooling, but the school has labeled my child "learning disabled" or "ADHD" and I worry that I'm not qualified to teach such a child.

It is noteworthy that many children who are labeled learning disabled in school turn out not to be disabled once they've been homeschooling for a while. Too often, the "LD" label is a result of group instruction; a child who does not follow the expected timetable, or learn in the expected way, does not thrive in a classroom setting. In school, for example, a child who is not yet reading at age 7 would be labeled LD, but in a homeschool setting such children learn to read when *they* are ready and become fluent readers within a short time. Read GWS for stories and lists of people with experience in this area who are willing to correspond with others, as well as many of the books on pp 6 & 7.

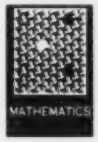
ARITHMETIC MADE SIMPLE, Sperling & Levison. Covers the material usually used in grades 1–8 in schools, all in a single book, with plenty of exercises and answers. Explains addition, subtraction, multiplication, long division; fractions, decimals, percentage and interest; measurement of lines, angles and perimeters; proportions; graphs; signed numbers. Simple, straightforward text. This is a useful book for people who want reassurance that they are covering basic arithmetic or that they can check an explanation if they need to. We recommend using it in conjunction with other books (such as those listed here) that emphasize mathematical thinking and mathematical activities. #134 $12.95

CARD GAMES FOR CHILDREN, Len Collis. 41 internationally known games divided into sections: solitaire, two player, three or more players, and family games. Clear pictures and explanations make this a good book for kids to use on their own. Some of the games, like the French Coinchee played with 32 cards, are unusual and all are great fun. Card games are a great way to learn about patterns, sequences, numbers, and other aspects of math since all the "math" is embedded in the cards and rules, not in textbook exercises. #3266 $6.95

ELEMENTARY ALGEBRA, Harold Jacobs. This introductory level textbook is "reader-friendly" and defuses algebra terror. You can browse, looking for things that interest you, instead of feeling you must plow grimly along in a straight line, understanding everything perfectly. Covers fundamental operations, functions and graphs, integers, rational numbers, equations in one and two variables, simultaneous equations, exponents, polynomials, factoring, fractions, square roots, quadratic equations, real numbers, fractional equations, inequalities, & number sequences. Answers to all Set II exercises (each chapter has 4 sets) are in the back of the book. #258 $49.95

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL: Answers to all of the problems plus instruction tips. #3328 $10.95. NOTE: The manual is not needed to learn math with this book.

"We tried tutoring but she was frustrated with that so we ordered your book. It is just right for her needs, so she is enjoying (no kidding!) the dreaded ALGEBRA!"—L. H. (KY)



MATHEMATICS: A HUMAN ENDEAVOR, 3rd Ed., Harold Jacobs. Our favorite book about not just the techniques but the spirit and beauty of math. Solving problems about basketball, the brightness of big picture TV screens, nails in Colonial America, misleading statistics and graphics, and hundreds more useful, fun, and interesting examples help make math accessible. Written at a high school - college introductory level, it is more than just a superb textbook. Covers number sequences, functions and their graphs, large numbers and logarithms, symmetry and regular figures, mathematical curves, methods of counting, probability, an introduction to statistics, and topology. Answers for selected exercises are provided in the back of the book. #3192 $58.95

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL: Answers to all of the problems plus instruction tips. #3329 $13.95. NOTE: The manual is not needed to learn math with this book.

THE I HATE MATHEMATICS! BOOK. Marilyn Burns. This doesn't look anything like a textbook or workbook; instead, it's full of things to do and wonder about—in the ice cream store, in the garden, as you wander about the neighborhood. The cartoons, jokes, puzzles, and activities help you explore topology, logical thinking, prime numbers, ratios, volume, diameter, probability, and more. The book can be used by children on their own, by children together, by a parent and child, and, not least of all, by adults who think they don't like math. #368 $12.95

NEW

The Algebra Survival Kit: A Conversational Guide for the Thoroughly Befuddled, by Josh Rappaport. Its conversational tone, question/answer format, and practice problems enable students to work their way through the entire book with little guidance. Combine these features with lively analogies, cartoons, and a fun layout (the book can also be used as a flip-chart), tab dividers to help you find information instantly and you have a clear exposition of all the material covered in an Algebra 1 course. Works well as a supplement/review to other math materials such as *Elementary Algebra* above, and as a stand-alone alternative to those with a distaste for *any* math textbook. #6012 $22.95

In its 520 pages you will also find:
— Algebra Wilderness "Bored" Game
— Emergency Fact Sheet Poster displaying all of Algebra 1's basic rules.
— Special notes that show how the kit conforms to national math standards
— Index
— Glossary

HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

How does homeschooling work? What do the families do all day?

As most families will tell you, there is no typical day. Homeschooling children learn through reading, through conversation, through play, through outside classes, through volunteer work and apprenticeships. Typically children will have some time on their own at home (to read, play, build, draw, write, do a science experiment, work on math), and some time with their parents (to get help with any of the above, to talk, to do some kind of focused project together), and some time with others outside the home (in music class, in Scouts, in a homeschoolers' book discussion group, in a volunteer job at a museum). Some families set aside a part of the day for focused academic work; others do not. Often this varies for each child and the family often adapts its schedule as the children grow and their needs change. See pp. 3 - 5, 6, 10 - 11 for family stories about homeschooling.

Do I need to spend a lot of money on homeschooling materials?

No more than you would ordinarily spend on a child's interests and activities. Homeschoolers often use the library and other free or low-cost community resources. They share or barter materials and skills with one another or with other people in the community. Some families are able to barter for outside lessons and to volunteer in exchange for admission to arts events or museums. Older homeschoolers find that volunteering is a good way to learn from adults outside the family, and it is often less expensive than taking a class or buying equipment.

Mail orders only to: John Holt's Bookstore, PO Box 8086, Walled Lake, MI 48391-8086

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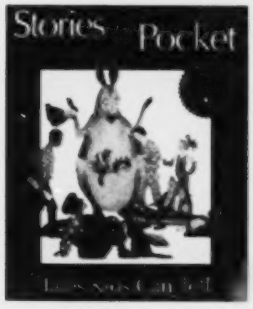

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HOMESCHOOLING Q & A

How can parents teach subjects with which they are not familiar?

They don't have to. Homeschooling doesn't mean that the parents are the only people from whom the child learns. The parents are facilitators, helping their children seek out information and hook up with other people. Homeschooling children may become interested in a subject or involved in an activity that their parents don't know much about and that's fine – there's a world of resources available.

What if my state requires testing, or if my children need to take standardized tests later for college admissions?

First, make sure that testing really is required in your state. Some states list testing as one of several options (the others being keeping a portfolio or getting an outside evaluation, usually). If you do have to test your children, you can prepare them by working on sample tests(just as schoolchildren do) and talking about test-taking strategies. Homeschoolers who want to go to college usually prepare for the SAT or the ACT by using one of the test preparation books or preparation services that are available. Not all colleges require these tests, however.

How do I find out about homeschooling in my state?

In general, some states require you to submit a plan to your local district, some require you to file with the State Department of Education and some allow you to register your home as a private school. You do not have to be a certified teacher. Local homeschooling groups are usually the best source of precise information about how to fulfill the requirements of the law in your state. Many groups have information packets for new homeschoolers, including information about laws and regulations. Addresses of these groups are published in the *GWS Directory Issue* (p. 3) and *The Beginner's Guide to Homeschooling* (p. 3).

I'm intrigued by the idea of homeschooling, but I don't want to have to give up my own work or interests. Will I have to?

Homeschooling doesn't have to mean sitting with your children six hours a day and giving them lessons. Some parents combine part-time work with homeschooling, and some even manage to work full-time and still allow their children to learn at home. Even parents (more often mothers, but sometimes fathers) who forego paid work to be home with their children do still have time for their own pursuits. You may find that your children become interested in what you are interested in. You may also find that you enjoy learning along with them. Older children typically have several outside activities, and sometimes relationships with adult friends or mentors, so you will not be the only one working with your children or helping them learn.

More Q & A, and many other resources, are inside this catalog!

FOCUS

Creating Our Own Ceremonies

Homeschoolers' Group Graduation

From Dori Griffin of Tennessee:

One of my best friends attended middle and high school at an expensive prep school. She's a year older than I am, so I attended her graduation exactly one year before mine took place. Hers was a long, formal, very traditional ceremony. It was also very impressive. I enjoyed being there for my friend and I was happy for her. On another level, though, it struck me as a very sad ceremony. Later I figured out why. It was almost like one of those beef-processing plants that every news show in the country showed pictures of during the e-coli scare. Individuals had been ground up into a mass uniform product ("educated students"), packaged in identical wrappings (caps and gowns), and sold to the waiting market (colleges).

After that, my vague, free-floating ideas about my own graduation got a lot firmer. Attending a traditional graduation ceremony told me what I didn't want. I didn't want a cap and gown, I wasn't wild about having "Pomp and Circumstance" played, and I didn't want some speaker who didn't even know me to tell me all about the supposed beginning of my adult life.

I should mention at this point that our homeschool support group already had a promotion and graduation ceremony in place. It had been instituted before anyone in the group was even close to graduating, the whole point being to get together at the end of the academic year and celebrate the accomplishments of the past year (academic and otherwise – mostly otherwise). Eventually there were kids in our group who were graduating, and we added the graduation part of the ceremony when the needs arose. Three other students graduated in the two years before I did. Their graduations had been very traditional: caps and gowns, a speaker, all the usual things. None of that was particularly set in stone, however, so I set about talking to the various people in charge of planning the event. I won't say that they weren't shocked to find out that I didn't want a traditional ceremony – most of them were. But they were also willing to talk to me and listen to what I had to say.

I was fortunate in that I was the only student graduating in our group's ceremony this year. (Another support group in town started a seniors-only traditional graduation ceremony this past year, and several of the graduates from our group chose to participate in that instead.) The one item that was a bit difficult to get around was the guest speaker. Somehow graduation seemed to imply a long address, so it had more or less become a given in the short space of two years. But in the end, plain old common sense solved the problem of my not wanting a speaker. The previous year's ceremony had taken a little over two hours. In a homeschool group with large families and lots of babies, that long a ceremony just didn't make sense. So, after much conversation, it was decided that if I didn't really want a speaker, that was fine with everybody else concerned. Past that, all my other requests were a breeze. Some of my choices aroused curiosity ("Why on earth don't you want it to be like school?"), but they were my choices and, well, if I wanted to deprive myself of the Graduation Experience, that was my business.

On May 17, 1998, my dad gave me my high school diploma and prayed for me. I said a few sentences about what homeschooling had meant to me – namely, freedom – and my dad said a few things, too. All told it took maybe five minutes. Both of my grandfathers, my grandmother,

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an aunt and uncle, and my mom, brother, and sister were in the audience, and to me that was one of the best parts of graduation: my family was with me. I'd picked out a special dress for the occasion (no cap and gown). Everything was just the way I'd hoped it would be. It was personal, not one small cog in an academic wheel.

It's probably worth mentioning that my graduation was personal on more levels than one. The events of the

My graduation was personal on more levels than one. The events of the ceremony itself were uniquely mine, but the timing and the reasons for graduating were mine too. Even though I did graduate at the traditional age and time, that was my choice. When I was 14 or 15, my parents and I seriously discussed my taking the GED as soon as possible and formally putting an end to my high school days. We eventually decided against that, mostly because at that time I didn't really have a firm idea of what I wanted to do with myself. The choice came up again when I started the eleventh grade (we kept track of grades for record-keeping purposes only). At that point, I'd already earned all the credits I needed for high school graduation, and I briefly considered graduating early. Again I decided against it because I didn't have any real purpose for moving on then.

This year, the idea of giving college a try grew on me. After much torturous thinking and planning, I had decided to try for a college scholarship, and, having received it, I now had a real reason for moving on. If I hadn't been ready to graduate, I would have spent another year as an official homeschooler; I knew that was a possibility. But I'd reached a decision, and that decision was to accept the college scholarship, and graduation became a necessity. Graduation for me was a choice and a personal celebration. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

My daughter Julie is turning 13 this November, and I'm going to have all the women and older girls who are important to her write her a poem, a prayer, a wish, or a blessing. I'll collect them all in an album to give to her. I remember that when I was young, there were lots of things that felt like rites of passages: your first nylon stockings, the first time you could wear lipstick. These felt like special moments that meant you were getting older, but for Julie and others like her who have already been in theater and dance performances and gotten to wear stage makeup and costumes, those particular rites of passage are no longer as significant. Still, I think that turning 13 is important to Julie, and I wanted to mark that on a deeper level, not just on a social level. In the past year or so, I've noticed that she has started to wrestle with philosophical issues; I've noticed a general *deepening* in her, and I think this album of thoughts from others will mark that and reinforce it. I also want to show her that there are good things about growing up as well as challenges, and that she has many people she can rely on when things do get tough.

— Lois Lake Church of Connecticut

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Between Childhood and Adolescence

From Ruth Matilsky (NJ):

It seemed to me that as our daughter April approached her 12th birthday, she was readying herself emotionally for taking a step toward womanhood. I noticed that she was expressing a restlessness and a frustration at being caught between childhood and adolescence. Some of this has to do with the fact that she's a middle child. She felt older than a little kid, but not old enough to do a lot of the things that her older brother and sister are doing. Sometimes she wanted to do more grown-up things and sometimes she clearly *didn't* want more responsibilities.

I felt that I wanted to acknowledge and mark this time in April's life somehow, and I started thinking that it would be a good idea to invite some women with whom April felt comfortable and have some kind of ritual. April's older sister Sarabeth was a big part of helping me think about this and plan it. At 18 Sarabeth is at another kind of threshold and I think she was probably closer to April's experience than I was, so she was better able to figure out what kind of ritual April would like. Sara had also created a coming-of-age party for herself at 16 that had worked out just the way she wanted it to.

The idea of having adult women at the event was important to us. So often parties that mark transitions – whether it's a Sweet Sixteen party or a Bat Mitzvah – are parties of peers only (or mostly). This doesn't make sense to me, especially when the party is about welcoming the child into the next stage of their life. (Recently I read a book to my kids in which a child from China is astounded to learn that at American birthday parties, only children of exactly the same age are invited, because, in China, birthdays are family events.)

So, for April's 12th birthday, we decided that we would invite the women that April chose to come to our house after dinner to do *something*. Here I had to let go of control, because I knew that April absolutely had to be in charge of the guest list, and she didn't invite everyone whom I would have invited. I worried about hurt feelings, but realized that this was such a personal event that April had to have the final word. She had to be completely comfortable with everyone present.

Sara was really responsible for choreographing the ritual; I don't know what I would have done without her. When everyone arrived we stood in a circle and I called the Four Directions, speaking of the Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. This is something that we do when we celebrate the Equinoxes and the Solstices. It is something I would not have understood a few years back, but our family has gradually become more tuned in to the cycles of nature, and April has spent the last year studying wild plants, so I felt it was particularly appropriate for her.

After that, I spoke of my pregnancy with April, telling her the story I have told many times, that when I did yoga and meditated in the months before my pregnancy, I would close my eyes and see a girl with long dark hair. The girl was always laughing. Before I even knew I was pregnant

with April, I found myself laughing at silly things. It was my first sign of her impending birth. When she was little, her hair was blond, but one day a few years back I was startled to see the girl of my meditations – April had turned into a laughing girl with long dark hair.

Then Sara spoke of maidens, mothers, and crones (Ancient Goddess tradition, which we have studied, speaks of these three aspects of Goddess), and we went around the circle, sharing our own experiences of entrance into maidenhood. We mentioned physical and emotional things we wished we'd known, some poignant, some funny. We were very frank. We left space for April to ask questions.

After that, we sang songs that most of us knew, and Sara spoke about leaving some things behind as one grows up. We formed a line and chanted, "When each child is gone, the morning star rises and sings to the universe who we are" (a friend had taught us these words; I don't know where she got the chant, but I love it). As we chanted, April walked down the line holding a candle. When she got to the end of the line, she blew it out and lit another. This was to symbolize leaving some things behind with childhood and walking toward womanhood.

That was it. The whole thing lasted about an hour. I thought it was quite nice, and I think it was good for April. She didn't talk about it a lot afterwards, but Sara told me that April said the ceremony was just the right thing. I think she had needed recognition that the community and

When I wrote annual Christmas letters to family and friends, I would write what each child had been doing – kind of a recap of the past twelve months. When the kids got older, I developed the habit of sitting with each one, privately, and letting them read what I had written (or reading it aloud to them). I was always very moved by how much *they* were moved by this. Almost all of the children would get tears in their eyes as they read what I had said about their year. It seemed to me the letter was a way for them to realize, "Wow, I did all of that neat stuff, and Mom must be really proud of me." I purposely shared the letter with each of them privately so that none of their siblings would be there making comments; each child had a chance to shine and really feel like the center of attention for that moment. The experience gave us all a way to reflect on the year. When parents tell me that they're worried about not doing enough with their kids, I joke to them, "Write a Christmas letter!" Even if you're directing your kids' activities very minimally, it's amazing, when you write it up, to see how much they've done in a year.

— *Susan Evans (MI)*

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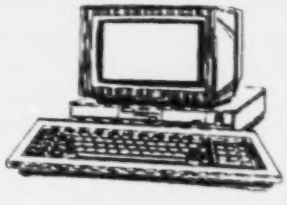

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her family were taking her seriously. The ceremony served as a way to connect April to the community of which we are a part. This is often a fringe community – our family's way of thinking and way of doing things are definitely different from a lot of families' (homeschooling, no TV, etc.) – and this can sometimes be hard on the kids, who are at times straddling two worlds. A ceremony like the one we had is a way of including the younger generation and showing them that we care where they are heading.

Recognizing and Appreciating

From Susan Shilcock (PA):

Throughout our family's homeschooling, it has always seemed like the children's growth and learning are so much part of a continuum that we didn't feel much need to mark transitions in a ceremonial way. We didn't have the sharp divisions between one grade and the next, as school students have. But we have had several ways over the years of recognizing, acknowledging, and celebrating the children's growth.

For example, on birthdays, we wanted to focus not just on the getting of gifts but on thinking about who we are and how we're growing. We developed the idea of "word presents." We traced around the birthday child's hand, on a piece of paper, and then the other family members would think of something to say that they appreciated about the birthday child. We'd write down those word presents on the same piece of paper. It was a nice chance for the children to think about giving something to each other that wasn't only a material present. A young sibling might say something as simple as, "I like the way Emily plays store." As they grew, the word presents got more sophisticated, like, "I really appreciated the way Nicholas was so thoughtful about sharing his computer expertise this year." Seeing all these word presents together, year after year, is a great way to reflect on a child's growth: you have this series of hands that get bigger each year, and you have thoughtful comments that capture who the child was at that time.

For many years, we also did something similar at dinnertime, which I called "Good News." We had a white board in the dining room, and I (or someone else) would write "Good News" about each member of the family – something that had happened that day or the day before. It might be something like, "Amanda had a challenging day working at the library but was successful at dealing with a difficult client" or "Julia was well-received at the senior center for her community service flute performance." In other words, it was whatever each person felt proud of or wanted to acknowledge about that day. Even if we hadn't been together during the day – if we'd all been off doing different activities – the "Good News" ritual was a way to keep in touch with everyone's day and their feelings about it. Often, the idea of what to write came from the child. Our son Nicholas might say, "Joey and I got three more layers done on my fort in the woods and I had a really good time," and so I'd write that down.

It's important to note that these "Good News" comments were more descriptive than evaluative. They didn't have the feel of a report card or even of a teacher's evaluation. It was a way of acknowledging everyone's daily lives, a way of paying attention to what was important to each of us. The use of descriptive details was enough to validate the activity, and, when preserved (we copied each day's Good News), also served as an ongoing family journal.

Our state law requires that we compile a portfolio at the end of the year. Although I initially felt burdened by this paperwork, I now view this requirement as something of real value: it helps me take stock of our homeschooling each year, and it creates a kind of family history that's neat to look back on. Originally, my husband Peter and I wrote a summary of each child's year from our perspective, but then we realized that it would also be interesting to hear what each child thought were the highlights of his or her year. So they started writing their own summaries, and I think this helped them reflect on the year, gave them a sense of what they had accomplished, and helped them focus on what their next area of interest or emphasis might be. Another positive result of this is that the children are now very comfortable with the portfolio approach, so when the oldest two were ready to apply to college (without transcripts or SAT scores, by their own choice), they had a lot of experience with portfolios and were able to put them together for college applications.

For our two oldest, we did choose to do a very personal graduation ceremony when they reached the end of homeschooling legally and were moving on to

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college. Why did we decide to do a ceremony then, when we hadn't done anything like it before? I guess it felt like an appropriate time to take a piece of what the rest of society does and try it on in a way that made sense for us. The local school superintendent had offered to give Amanda (our oldest) a diploma from the district, so it seemed like a good opportunity to have some kind of ceremony. Amanda was very clear about how she wanted it to happen: she wanted it to be small and personal, with only the people who had been involved in her education attending. She spoke at the event, reflecting on her homeschooling years and acknowledging the different people in the room who had helped her grow in various ways. Then other people spoke about her, including the superintendent who had written a beautiful poem for the occasion.

Although our family has chosen to ritualize many smaller daily moments, it is interesting to think also about what value there is in marking significant transitional moments. When does it seem contrived and when does it really make sense? Sometimes I look to other societies for guidance, to see how they ritualize their transitional stages (the Amish, for example). I think that ceremonies, when they feel right, do give the person something to hold onto, something that they can then carry into their future life. The mark of a family, that family's particular values and characteristics, often shows up in the type of ceremony they create.

Some of the most meaningful moments in my transition to adulthood have involved taking societal milestones and making them personal with private or immediate-family-only celebrations. For example, at the age of 17, I graduated from homeschool/high school. My parents and I felt that I had completed the areas of study traditionally taught in public high schools, even though my learning had taken place in a non-traditional way. I was also interested in taking classes at the local community college, and for me it made sense to take these as a graduate, and not student, of high school. To celebrate this transition, I made myself a mortar-board hat, and had a little party with my immediate family. I was presented with a diploma, and the Principal of our homeschool (my dad) made a little speech. My parents gave me a watch to signify that this was a timely and important moment.

The next year, turning 18 was special to me because it meant that "official adulthood" had been reached. Among other things, it meant that 1 1/2 years later, I could vote in the 1996 presidential election. Stepping into the voting booth and making my choice was a very inspiring moment for me. My parents always took me to the polls with them, and I had always felt myself to be mostly an observer of the democratic process. Finally society was giving me the privilege of participating. — *Mae Shell (VT)* ◆

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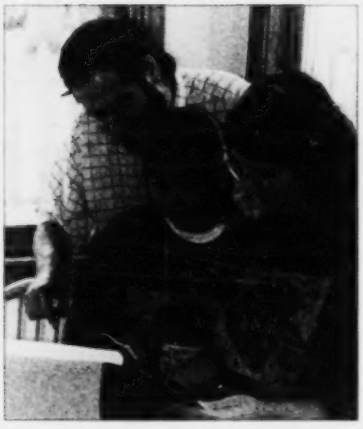

photo by Sherry Boyce

How can kids and adults truly work together, instead of working *for* each other or *on* each other? Is there a third alternative to kids doing everything themselves or adults taking over? Here, Nancy Gruver and Joe Kelly of *New Moon* magazine talk about collaboration, joint decision-making, and respect.

Susannah Sheffer: How did you come up with the idea of structuring *New Moon* as a collaboration between girls and adults?

Nancy Gruver: I got the idea for the magazine both from reading *Meeting at the Crossroads* by Carol Gilligan and Lyn Mikel Brown and from having unschooled our girls. Those were the two major influences in my coming to this way of working together. The part that came from Brown and Gilligan had to do with their assertion that it's important for girls in adolescence to have intimate relationships with adult women, and that those relationships have to be two-way, and open and honest. As I thought about starting a magazine for girls, I realized that if it was really going to do what I wanted it to do, girls had to be involved in making real decisions about the magazine. That had to be a core part of it.

Joe Kelly: And the idea of having young people make real decisions wasn't a foreign concept to us because of our unschooling experience. We had learned through our own anxieties in beginning and then sustaining unschooling that we could indeed trust our kids to make decisions. They were capable of taking on that responsibility and capable of learning from their mistakes.

NG: Another connection between unschooling and Brown and Gilligan's book was the idea that girls' own knowledge is valuable. An important premise of the magazine was that the girls would have things to teach me. They would be able to bring up things about being girls that I had forgotten; they would know more than I did about their own condition and would therefore help the magazine to be connected to girls' real concerns.

SS: How did other people respond to the idea?

NG: A lot of people thought it was a great idea, but they didn't really know what we meant. I'm not sure *we* really understood what we meant, either, until we actually started doing it!

JK: Even today, years later, when we go out and talk about the magazine, there's sometimes an undertone in people's response: "The kids don't really do it" or "But who's *really* in charge?" The only way we can truly convince people that the girls are making significant decisions is by having them come observe a meeting.

SS: I find that people can more easily imagine the extremes – either the adults run the magazine and the girls are only there for show, or the girls put out the magazine all by themselves without adult help. What seems hardest to imagine is that both the girls and the adults are a crucial part of it. It's as if people have trouble understanding collaboration.

NG: That's really a key point, that poeple don't understand collaboration. That's what I was talking about earlier when I said we didn't understand it ourselves until we started doing it. We're trying to explore the grey area between adults doing it all and kids doing it all – the grey area that is collaboration. We are all bringing an equal degree of commitment, passion, and just plain willingness to work hard. And then we have to listen to each other and respect each other. Sometimes the view of one person or subgroup prevails, and sometimes the other.

JK: Some people say that the magazine looks too professional to be put out by girls, as though a publication put out by girls can only be mimeographed and stapled. But that misses a crucial point in the genesis of the magazine. When we first started talking to girls about it, one of the things they were most passionate about was that they wanted it to be a *real* magazine, as they put it. They wanted it to look professional, so by following up on that and working to make it look that way, we were really following through on the girls' decision.

NG: Which is another important point: how we adults view our job. We view our job as helping these girls bring their knowledge and their voices into a public arena so that they will be respected. I think the girls understood, even better than we did at the

beginning, that in order to be accorded that respect it would be necessary for the magazine to look "real."

SS: So the girls knew that in order to reach that goal, they needed adult help?

NG: I think they did recognize that. That's why there's mutual respect – an understanding that the kids and adults have different knowledge, different abilities, and we need both.

JK: The power that we adults bring to the process is often the power to mediate between the girls and the outside world, the world of adults. If the kids say, we want it printed this way, and the printer says, "They don't know what they're talking about," we can say, "You'll do it this way or we'll find another printer." Of course, that's an extreme example, and in fact we've never had anything happen quite like that, but the point is that because we do have the power to take our money elsewhere, we can make it clear to other people that we are using that power to support the girls on the editorial board.

SS: Was it easy for the girls to understand that you intended to share the decision-making power with them?

JK: I notice that it takes time for girls to trust us. Even when someone says kids are going to have a say, often the adult has some other agenda as well and won't let the kids go too far. When a new girl comes on the board, it usually takes a little while before she comes to trust the adults fully. I remember this was true when I was our managing editor, the one working with the girls directly at meetings, and the current managing editors say they experience the same process. It takes a conscious effort on the part of adults to convey that we really are the girls' peers in running the magazine. And the big challenge for adults is often just to be quiet, to listen.

NG: For me the biggest challenge is being emotionally honest with the girls. If I'm having a crummy day, I don't pretend I'm not. If something is upsetting to me, I don't pretend it's not upsetting.

SS: You said you had to learn about collaboration as you went along. Were there surprises at the beginning?

NG: The story about naming the magazine is a good example. I had this great idea to call it *Artemis*. I thought it would be perfect to name the magazine after the goddess of the moon: it would be mysterious and intriguing and have something to do with girls and women. I had my reasons all figured out. I brought the idea to one of the early meetings with the Girls Editorial Board. I gave them a long speech about the moon as a symbol and why we should have a name that had the idea of moon in it, and finally I said, "That's why I think we should name the magazine *Artemis*." They just kind of looked at me. No one liked the idea. We had only had about two or three meetings at this point, and I didn't know a lot of the girls. Some were friends of our daughters, but many had been brought in by other people. Everything was very polite, but it was clear that they didn't want that name. This evolved into a six-week-long argument. I kept telling them why we should use my idea; they kept saying, each time slightly more vehemently, that it was not a good idea. All the girls were in agreement, but I was quite firm. I kept saying, "Well, what would you like to name it, then?" They didn't have any other ideas, and at first I thought, "That must mean that mine is the best."

JK: I think that happens a lot with kids. If we have an idea that they don't like, we whip back in a powerful way and say, "Well, do *you* have any ideas?" and if they don't, that's it. But you have to listen to their resistance, their silence, and sometimes you have to probe it and try to figure out what that silence is communicating.

NG: Right, because kids don't usually have the same ability adults have to make facile arguments, but they still know things. They couldn't give me 20 brilliant arguments about why *Artemis* wasn't a good name, but I did have to pay attention to them

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anyway. Eventually I realized that I was undermining the original principle of the magazine by not listening to them, and I finally said, "OK, we'll get a different name." It was our graphic designer who came up with the name *New Moon*. I suggested it to the girls and they all said, "Fine." With 20-20 hindsight, it's easy to see that they were right about the name and I was wrong.

SS: What are-some of the real decisions that girls on the board make now that the magazine is up and running?

JK: They pick the themes, they work with cover artists in a multi-step process, they read every submission, they decide what will be used, they come up with story ideas, they review and edit drafts and give directions to the writer for revisions, they choose artwork, they go around with red pens on proofs of the magazine and mark up what they like and don't like, they critique the issue after it's printed, they go out and speak on behalf of the magazine.

SS: How do the adults fit into that process?

JK: Well, the adults brainstorm story ideas too. Let's say one of the managing editors (who are adults) comes to a meeting and says, "How about an Anne Frank story?" The girls might say, "Well, we had an Anne Frank story years ago, but we really like Anne Frank, so how can we do a different kind of story about her?" After some discussion they decide to do a story about how Anne Frank's father edited her diaries. The girls are only here every two weeks, so in the intervening time between that meeting and the next one, the managing editor would assign the story, see that it gets written in time, and bring it to the next meeting. The girls go over it, and say things like, "That's a word an 8-year-old won't understand," and the managing editor goes back to the writer to discuss what came up at the meeting. In some ways the adult's role is to carry out the girls' directions, but that's not all it is, because the adult is also participating.

SS: Are there situations in which girls will explicitly ask the adults for help with something?

JK: We fairly regularly do interviews over the phone, and beforehand, the girls who are conducting the interview will sit with one of the adults and brainstorm questions to ask. They also might ask advice about the particular interview subject; maybe we adults know something about that person's life that would be interesting to ask about and that the girls might not have known.

SS: What about times when the girls want to publish something but the adults for some reason don't feel comfortable with it? Does that happen?

NG: Well, one time the girls chose a piece written by a girl, in the first person, about her father shooting her mother. It was a very scary story, obviously, but the girls wanted to publish it. After that editorial meeting, the adults discussed it. We wondered whether it was too scary for our younger readers, but we ultimately decided to trust the board's judgment. If we really had decided that we felt it was too scary to publish, we would have gone back to the board and said, "We're worried about this."

JK: We get asked that question about whether the girls make a decision we don't agree with far more than it ever actually happens. It's interesting. What causes that attitude that assumes there's going to be so much disagreement and conflict?

SS: Maybe it partly comes from people's experience of school newspapers, where the students often want to publish material that the faculty advisor says is too inflammatory.

NG: If we felt that way about something, we would talk about it with the board; we wouldn't just forbid it.

JK: It can go both ways. I remember once I said that I thought a piece wasn't polished enough, and the girls said, "But that's what lets the writer's voice come through." But another time, I thought a piece was charming, the way it was written, and yet one of the girls said, "Yes, but it's not clear this way."

SS: How else is your adult experience helpful in the meetings?

NG: Every group has its ebbs and flows in creativity and efficiency, and we have times when things are really clicking and moving along well and other times when the kids are not focusing too well and the meeting is slow as molasses. As the adults it's our job to say something like, "These comments are not going to help us; we have to get more specific." Or sometimes we have to impose the idea of taking turns talking.

JK: Our job is to respond to what's going on and to keep the overall schedule in mind. If we're having an unproductive meeting and we know there's a little cushion of time in our editorial schedule, we can say, "Let's go up to the playground and take a break." But if it's the same situation on a day when we know this is the last chance in the production schedule that we'll have to talk about a particular thing, we'll remind everyone of that. In other words, there are times when we need to take on that kind of leadership. But sometimes the girls will do that too.

NG: I think it's important for adults and kids to acknowledge that they do have different knowledge and different perspectives. This comes up in the family, too. If we share our knowledge with respect, we can help our kids think of things they wouldn't have thought of otherwise. Sometimes I think it's even an abdication of our responsibility to pretend that we don't know things that we do in fact know.

SS: That comes up a lot in relationships between kids and adults, doesn't it? That question of how to offer the greater knowledge or experience that the adult may have, without making it seem as if this always gives you more power?

JK: I think a lot of times we as parents will act out of fear, without fully articulating what it is we know

about, because we're trying to protect our kids. So we'll say "don't do that" without explaining what knowledge we have that makes us want to protect them from that particular experience. I've been interviewing fathers about their relationship with their daughters, for a book I'm writing. So many fathers were afraid about their daughters getting involved in dating, but one father blew me away because he said, "I'm excited about this, because there's so much I can tell her about what it's like to be a boy at that age." This father was ready and willing to share his information and experience with his daughter. He was even looking forward to it! That was so unusual, and it was something that had never occurred to me to do. It takes a lot of courage and love to decide you're going to talk openly to your daughter instead of only trying to protect her.

SS: Yes. And I'm thinking that in another way, this problem of how to say what we know from our greater experience also comes up in the academic arena, the homeschooling arena. For example, sometimes parents worry when their children don't spend time on a particular academic subject. They worry that they're closing off future options, and the idea is that the adults are better able to see down the road.

JK: We may have a sense of the big picture, but it's still not our job to make decisions for our children. Our job is to share our knowledge with them.

NG: And the big picture we have is *our* big picture. It's based on our lives, our experience; it's not necessarily the objective big picture. It *is* our job to see down the road, but we're not perfect either.

SS: Years ago we had a discussion in GWS with a teenager who was saying that she had developed a block about math and was only just now, at 15 or so, going back to math and trying to deal with the problem. I asked if she blamed her mother at all for this gap in their homeschooling, so to speak, and she said that it had never occurred to her to blame her mother because she had felt it was her own responsibility to learn math. If she had asked for help and her mother had refused, then, yes, she would be angry, but otherwise ....

JK: I do think that we have to trust kids' interests and passions even when they go in directions we don't always have much influence on. But sometimes I think part of our job *is* to take the blame, too. Right now our daughter Mavis is trying to raise money for a conference she wants to go to. She's been procrastinating writing the letters she needs to write, and we've been gently prodding her to do it. She gets mad at us for bringing it up and reminding her that she has to meet this deadline. It hurts when she turns away and yells, but on the other hand I would rather she blame me for a few hours now than not get to do what she wants later on.

SS: Now, that's interesting, because it sounds a lot like a justification for requiring a child to do math. You'd rather she blame you now for prodding her because you see the bigger picture ...

JK: But the difference is that this conference was something she desired. It was a decision she had made, so it was our job to keep saying to her, "This is something you said you really want to do, and in order to do that, you're going to have to do some things you really hate." Of course, she *knew* that already but was just resisting it.

NG: If that teenager you mentioned *had* blamed her mother in some way for not making her do math, or even for not helping her in some way, my response would be that we can talk for a long time about what we *didn't* do, but I'll always come back to, "What do you want to do *now*?" It's important to realize that there are always going to be regrets, and we can choose to focus on them or we can choose to focus on where we are now. No matter what happened or didn't happen in the past, I approach our kids with the confidence that they *can* get where they want to go and we can help them. ◆

See above right for New Moon *info.*

For more info about *New Moon* and the companion newsletter *New Moon Network: For Adults Who Care About Girls*,call 800-381-4743.

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Watching Children Learn

Listing What They Want to Learn

Gail Helms of California writes:

Our family began with detailed schedules and checklists, accompanied by utter frustration (on my part) and outright refusal (on my son's part). We've evolved into enthusiastic learning led by our interests. Here's how it currently works: each family member comes up with ideas about what they want to learn based on their interests, talents, and daydreams. We get together with pencil and paper and brainstorm, jotting down what we each feel we'd like to delve into. We try to do this on a monthly basis, sometimes every other month, depending on the depth and breadth of the interests and goals, the pace at which we're pursuing them, and countless other family life factors.

Last time we did this, my son Rogan (6) listed over fifteen topics, including insects, money, cooking, weaving, books, and building with metal and wood. Alana (4) came up with her own long list. For myself, I recorded writing, running, sewing, and dancing, among a few others. I persuaded my husband, of the list-shy personality, to participate as well. As parents, making our own lists helps us to stay focused, allows us to set examples for the children, and prevents me from losing myself in mothering. Our family's lists tend to reflect interests and talents rather than specific goals, usually. Goals tend to sprout up once an interest really takes hold: I sign up for a half marathon, or Rogan vows to read an entire mystery book before he falls asleep at bedtime, for example. Sometimes an interest fizzles out; sometimes it's a long, slow process and sometimes it's short and intense. Sometimes an interest will pop up out of nowhere and take precedence over anything originally on a list, so flexibility is crucial.

After we've brainstormed, each of us chooses three our four topics from the list. We mull over them, thinking up ways to experience or pursue the interest. We often research topics at the local library, and the books we find often provide stepping stones to further our interests. I involve my children as much as possible in the research, my goal being to show them how to ask questions and find answers. I enjoy this part of the process and tend to come up with far too many projects, games, books, experiments, and field trips to accomplish realistically. That's all right – we have choices, then. When Rogan found *The Bug Book*, he was inspired to make an aspirator for extracting tiny or poisonous insects and to purchase mealworms from the pet store to witness their transformation. An interest in woodworking led to his constructing a treasure chest from a kit.

To calm my own fears about not covering everything our district's Independent Study Program asks us to, I usually take a look at where Rogan is in terms of Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and so on. Sometimes I choose a focus I think we need to cover, such as math facts from 1-10 or learning how to form letters correctly. I come up with some simple, creative way to introduce these topics based on how Rogan learns best. Since he has a very mathematical/logical mind, I often adapt card and board games to suit our needs. (Peggy Kaye's books are a wonderful resource for learning through games.) When there is resistance, I ask myself if the approach was inappropriate or if my child is just not ready to learn that concept. I strive to respect my children's unique learning rhythms. More and more, I find that by following Rogan's interests, all bases are eventually covered anyway.

Each week, I check our current list to see where we are and to plan activities and field trips. I try to plan so each family member has time to focus on an interest, as well as time to do nothing. I keep a running list of new ideas and questions the children have, so we're never at a loss for new topics or projects. When I feel we're running out of steam with the list we have, then it's usually time to get together to create some new adventures.

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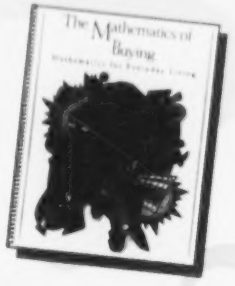

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Is He Reading Yet?

Mary O'Malley of Maryland writes:

Few questions have unnerved me as much as, "Is he reading yet?", or perhaps more accurately, "Isn't he reading yet?" You would think that after years of experience with "Isn't he weaned yet?" and "Isn't he toilet trained yet?", such a question would not faze me. Though I have learned to respect, value, and enjoy each of my children's unique timetable, the reading question has resulted in a fair amount of reflection and information-seeking on my part. Questions I have asked myself include, "Am I doing something wrong?" "Should I be actively encouraging reading aloud or should I let time take its course?" "Perhaps someone else could teach my child this skill better?" "Perhaps I should invest in a special program to encourage reading."

Stories in GWS about spontaneous reading at later ages, though reassuring, have also fueled my anxiety. These stories often made it sound as though reading just happened. I knew I could trust my learners to read when ready, but what if there was a true problem that interfered with acquiring reading skills? Would I recognize it? What, I wondered, were the signs that the groundwork was being laid for future reading?

Kevin, almost 11 as I write this, now describes himself as a reader. It wasn't always this way.

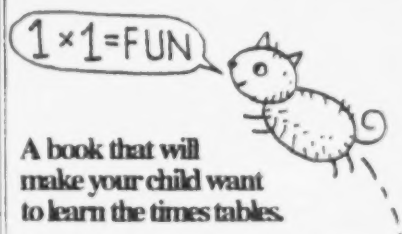
When Kevin was 16 months old he had over 60 recognizable words in his vocabulary. By the age of 2 he was speaking in fairly complex sentences. In his early years he would delight our relatives with his creative use of language. Listening to me read aloud has always been a source of joy and relaxation. Naively I assumed that his early verbal skills and love of literature would be followed by early reading. But no spontaneous reading occurred at age 4 or 5. When Kevin was 5, he pointed out the "k"s on the page we were reading and asked about the spaces between the letters (denoting words). I was reassured that some of the skills for reading were being developed, and I could share this observation with relatives, thus relieving some of the pressure that inevitably comes when you deviate from the school path.

The next year, I was thrilled when Kevin sounded out "food" as we drove by the GIANT FOOD grocery store. I was sure this was a turning point. However, no additional words followed, and after some discussion, I realized he couldn't identify all the letters and sounds of the alphabet. At about this time, my mom offered to buy a phonics program for us to use. Though I appreciated the offer and the support it demonstrated, I was reluctant for her to invest in a program that I was not convinced was necessary.

The autumn Kevin turned 7 and his younger sister Sheila was 4 1/2, I began to think in terms of school again. My old anxieties about the reading issue began to rise. I determined to teach reading and borrowed a variety of phonics books from the library. These were met with a decided lack of enthusiasm from both my children. After a few unhappy attempts to force the issue, I returned the books and shelved the idea. We resumed contented hours of reading aloud with wonderful books such as those by Edward Eager, Elizabeth Enright, and Eleanor Estes. I continued to help my children make sense of written language whenever they asked me about the words in signs, greeting cards, advertisements and other places. Thank you notes provided another real-life opportunity for writing, which is part of the process of learning to read.

The next September, anticipating Kevin's 8th birthday and the birth of a baby in December, I decided once again that it was time to work on reading. I was concerned that the arrival of a baby would make life very hectic and that there would be little time for reading aloud. Out came the phonics books, met by the same lack of enthusiasm. I thought, perhaps we should try a sight-reading approach. I considered a number of possible books, but decided to go with what we already had: the ever-popular *Hop on Pop*. Slowly we went through the pages, with me reviewing sounds and prompting when asked. Though Kevin made some progress, it required tremendous effort and seemed to bring as much discouragement as encouragement.

Fables of the TIMES TABLES



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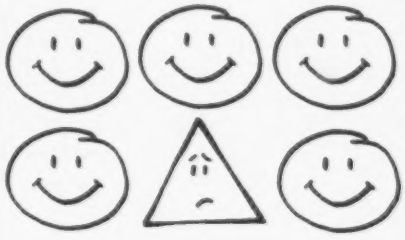

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We abandoned this approach for a while. As it turned out, we were snowed in a great deal that winter, and cuddling with a new baby and reading aloud were completely compatible activities.

About this time, I read a short chapter, "Teaching Your Kids to Read," by John McMahon in a book whose name escapes me. The suggestion here was to teach the sounds of the consonants, one at a time, then the sounds of the short vowels, then combining consonants and vowels, adding end consonants, and so on. Using our Scrabble tiles, we made up a game using these suggestions. This was a great deal of fun, as Kevin could add letters to create words critical to a boy's vocabulary (from "fat" to "fart," for instance). We did this game until Kevin lost interest.

As Kevin approached his 9th birthday, he was more aware of the reading ability of his peer group. He was teased by some boys because he wasn't reading as well as some of the other kids. He unburdened his worries to me one night, and I promptly unburdened mine to my husband. The next day, my husband came home with a computer program, *The Interactive Reading Journey*. I had always resisted the computer approach to reading, for reasons I honestly can't articulate clearly. I do see computers as useful, but I think reading should be learned from living people. But the kids were thrilled, and as soon as the program was installed, they were at it: first Kevin, then Sheila. Well, let me tell you that Kevin zipped right through that program. According to it, he could read just fine. So while I don't think it improved his ability, it did give his self-confidence a (rather expensive) boost. Sheila, on the other hand, who was not yet reading, worked at the program until she figured out how to get the "bells and whistles" – the gimmicks – but she did not learn to read from it.

That fall, Kevin listed "reading chapter books" as one of his goals. He suggested that he could work toward that goal by playing the Scrabble tile game and by working through some easy readers. The tile game was once again a great deal of fun. Finding an easy reader that he liked was more difficult. After a while, we settled on using joke books. The vocabulary suited his level, and the ridiculous jokes helped to diffuse any tension that arose at times.

I still experienced a lot of anxiety. Perhaps I should have bought one of those phonics programs early on, perhaps I wasn't patient enough, etc. I borrowed two books from the library that were very reassuring. In *Your Nine Year Old*, the author Louise Bate Ames writes that the current system of averaging boys' and girls' reading abilities together does a disservice to boys, as boys in general read later than girls. She said that many boys currently labeled late readers would be considered within the normal range if boys' abilities were averaged separately. In *Your Child's Growing Mind*, the author Jane Healy has suggestions for parents to help their children with reading, and I could see that we were doing all those things. Also, I took a good hard look at my son and all the other interesting and considerate things he was doing. His thoughtfulness and creativity reassured me that he was learning in his own way.

Like many skills that develop and improve over time, learning to read in our house has followed an uneven course. There has been progress followed by plateaus followed by valleys of discouragement. My children have been aware of the high value our culture places on reading because of the comments of well-intentioned relatives and friends and even television and radio commercials. Conveying my belief in my children's capabilities and encouraging their efforts has been at least as important as, if not more important than, providing appropriate materials.

Kevin now refers to himself as a reader. He still reads aloud to me periodically (the perennial favorite being *Calvin and Hobbes*). We occasionally go back and review letters and sounds, as it seems that just when you have a letter combination figured out, along comes another combination to trick you. Sheila is just now beginning to recognize some words in books, signs, advertisements, and elsewhere. Kathleen, now 2 1/2, mimics her older siblings, reading aloud and asking how things are spelled. I imagine I will worry much less about the girls' progress after learning so much from Kevin's experience.

Taking Children Seriously

Do you sometimes wonder whether unschooling goes far enough? Would you like support in extending freedom to *all* aspects of your children's lives, not just 'education'? Are you looking for practical ways of improving your relationships with them?

TCS is an educational philosophy whose most distinctive feature is the idea that it is possible and desirable to bring up children entirely without making them do things against their will. The *Taking Children Seriously* journal provides support for those trying to ensure that their children's learning in *every* sphere is motivated by their own interests, and not by externally imposed incentives or penalties.

To subscribe, send a check, payable to TCS, for US$19 (4 issues) or US$36 (8 issues) to TCS (Ref G), 5668 Township Road 105, Mount Gilead, Ohio 43338, USA. For rates outside USA, email: info@TCS.ac or phone: (419) 947 6351. TCS web site: http://www.eeng.dcu.ie/~tcs/

11-Year-Old Dental Helper

Lane DeYoung (IL) writes:

Since I was young I have said I wanted to be a dentist. I don't know why I'm interested in dentistry; it's just a feeling I've had that this is what I want to do in my life. I'm 11 now. Several months ago, I started to pursue my dream by helping in a dentist's office weekly. I first asked my dentist about volunteering when I saw him for my check-up; next I wrote to him and followed up a week later with a phone call. In my letter I said, "... My volunteering would not only benefit me but also you, because you would have free

help around the office. In return you could show me dental techniques that will help me in the future. Please consider using my help. I am willing to learn! "

After about a week, Dr. Favale contacted me and we arranged a time that I could come in. Once a week, while at the office, I watch Dr. Favale and his assistant do root canals, crowns, and bridges, fix chipped teeth, put in tooth color and silver fillings. My responsibilities are to help the assistant, Mary Ann, wash down the room and set it up for the next patient. I bring in the patients and watch the procedures. In between patients, we refill supplies. I have wrapped tool cassettes and put x-ray film in the developer. I know what drill burs Dr. Favale likes to use and what order to put the tools when I set up. I have learned to put the suction and water/air spout in their correct place.

I have seen some patients many times as they get continuing work done. I was even there to see Dr. Favale and Mary Ann put on my dad's temporary and permanent crown. I have encountered many patients and feel I am lucky they let me view their dental work being done.

After I had been volunteering for only nine weeks, Dr. Favale and Mary Ann asked me if I would like to come to one of the biggest dental conventions in the midwest. I said that I would like that very much. I rode on the train with both assistants and then we walked through all the exhibits. I came home with lots of toothbrushes and new toothpastes! I felt proud that Dr. Favale and Mary Ann had asked me to come with them after only knowing me for a short time.

I try to wear light or pastel colors when I work so I look similar to everyone else in the office, and it makes me feel very professional when I do. Right now I volunteer weekly for about two hours, but I plan to increase that to twice a week or more next year.

I keep a journal of what I see and do during my work so that I may be able to use it when I get to my college years. I hope to use my volunteer hours towards some of my college credits in the future. Meanwhile, being unschooled gives me the freedom and flexibility to pursue my dream.

Encouraging Good Deeds

Taj Schottland of Vermont writes:

I started Project 2000 when I was 8 years old; now I am 9. One night I was thinking there are a lot of bad things happening in schools. I thought if people did good deeds towards each other no one would have time to be mean. There would just be good things happening. I decided to work to get people to be nice to each other. I thought doing good deeds would be perfect. I decided I would start a project that encouraged people to do good deeds. I thought since the year 2000 is coming up, I would encourage people to do 2,000 good deeds by the year 2000 and I would call it Project 2000.

I called some of my friends. I asked if they would like to help me run Project 2000. I got three friends to help me. We decided to try to get one hundred groups or individuals to commit to doing 2,000 good deeds by the year 2000. We decided good deeds could be as simple as saying thank you or cleaning up your room without being asked to do it or as complicated as trying to communicate with a person who has a communication disability. Those are all good deeds; none is more valuable than another.

I didn't think Project 2000 was really going to happen. I thought it was a fantasy. But before I knew it, we had a brochure, we were going to be interviewed by a newspaper reporter, and then we had a school sign up! In our brochure we have a governor's proclamation (where the governor encourages people to support the project). The proclamation is very cool – it has the governor's signature and the state seal.

We now have four whole schools and six other groups or individuals committed to doing 2,000 good deeds by the year 2000. We had another newspaper article that brought in some more sign-ups. We also now have a web page where you can ask us questions and you can sign up and learn more about Project 2000. You can also read exciting, funny, and interesting things about other people doing good deeds.

Project 2000's creators (l-r): Taj Schottland, Leigh Elliott, Samantha Elliott

Through doing Project 2000, I became a leader. It has been very fun, but it has also been difficult. I thought being a leader would be a great thing but it has been very hard as well because I have to keep the project going so that it doesn't get stagnant. Working on a project has taught me a lot. I have become a better writer, I have learned to talk in public more easily, I have learned to express myself more easily on paper. I feel good that I am making a difference in the world. It is very exciting to do a project and for it to do well.

You can sign up and join us in the effort to make a better world. You can sign up through our web page (www.together.net/~peace) or write us at PO Box 8345, N. Brattleboro, Vermont 05304. ◆

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter. (3) If you're writing to a specific person, write "GWS" or "Holt Associates" on the envelope in addition to the individual's name.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper or on a 3.5" disc that can be

read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too). We *prefer* not to receive submissions by email.

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or prescriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

To get in touch with someone who has been published in GWS, see the explanation of our Directory, below.

Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1998 Directory was published in GWS #120. The complete 1999 Directory will be published in GWS #126.

Within each state, names are arranged **in zip code order** to make it easy for readers to find others nearby and for travelers to find host families in a particular area. If you're looking for someone by name, skim the last names, which are printed in capital letters. When you're reading a GWS story, how can you tell if that writer is listed in the DIrectory? If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, address the outside of the envelope to the writer's name, c/o GWS. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those who ask to be listed, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information.

If a Directory listing is followed by a (H), the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Caroline & Aaron FALK (Katie/96) 1745 W 26 St, San Pedro 90732 (H) ••• June & Bernie DODGE (Alex/88) email dodge1@athome.com, (San Diego) 92120 ••• Amy & Chamba COOKE (Nora/92) The Venice Community School, 31191 Road 180, Visalia 93292 **(H)** •••

Michaelia MORGAN (Morgan/87) 628 Pine Av #2, Pacific Grove 93950

GA — Fatimah AFIF-SHABAZZ (Aina Dini/84) 1412 Eastland Rd SE, Atlanta 30316-3222 **(H)**

IA — David & Mary KENYON (Dan/80, Beth/82, Michael/87, Rachel/88, Matthew/93, Emily/96) 1526 300th Av, Dyersville 52040 (change)

KS — Marcy HALL & John WHITMORE (Gabrielle/95) 7801 Allman, Lenexa 66217 (change)

KY — Alvin & Fannie MADDEN-GRIDER (Aaron/88, Arielle/90) 80 Kimberly Ln, Clearfield 40313 **(H)**

ME — Sally EMBER (Merlyn/80) 129 Smutty Ln, Saco 04072 (change) ••• Patricia LOGAN & John COTTINGHAM (Jesse/89) 819 Bolsters Mills Rd, Otisfield 04270 **(H)** ••• Janet JACOBSON-FALLOS & Harold FALLOS (Tom/80, Matt/91) Home & Unschoolers Group (HUG), RR 1 Box 925E (Biscay & Pinkham Rds), Damariscotta 04543 **(H)**

MD — Kevin & Katherine LOLLAR (Max/86, Mischa/89) South Mtn Homeschoolers, PO Box 483, Burkittsville 21718

MA — Cheryl PINTO & Ron MADIGAN (Molly/89, Hannah/93) 30 Gardner St, Peabody 01960 ••• Janet BURKE (Aisa/88, Ian/94) PO Box 156, Cuttyhunk Island 02713

MI — Marybeth WILSON & Sean MUNN (Marley/90, Aidan/95) 402 E Maple St, Mason 48854

NE — Jody & Steve SCHAUBROECK (Kelcie/92, Cole/94) 301 Iowa St, Utica 68456

NJ — Donna CONDOULIS (Georgina/89, Kimberly Ann/91) 522 Rhode Island Av, Brick 08724

NY — Mark & Anne HODGE (Emily/88, James/90, Peter/93) 39 North St, Saratoga Spgs 12866 (change) **(H)** ••• Anne & Paul BONAPARTE-KROGH (Mary/83, Katie/85, Phoebe/90) PO Box 474, Etna 13062-0474 (change) ••• Kathy RICHARDSON (Samantha/84) 27 Colonial Lawns, Bath 14810 **(H)**

OH — Sean Wolf HILL & Desiree POWERS (Anya/85, Henry/89, Greta/93) 210 Northwood Dr, Yellow Springs 45387 (change) **(H)**

PA — Sarah & Dan HAUG (Brynne/91, Carew/93, Gareth/97) email dbh134@psu.edu (State College)

WI — Katie PERRY & Rich WALKER (Alex/90, Ian/93, Maria/96) 2325 Prais St, Stevens Pt 54481 (change)

Canada:

AB — Susan SPYKER-NOONAN & Gavin NOONAN (Sage/92, Tansy/94) 11 Mosely Close, Red Deer T4N 5S8 **(H)**

Other Locations — Einer & Natalie MORTENSEN (Ariel/75, Kellen/87, Tristan/90) 1900 Garden St, Laredo TX 78040 (residence is San Miguel de Allende, **Mexico**) ••• Tadaaki & Nancy HACHISU (Christopher/91, Andrew/85, Matthew/96) 1-28 Harashinden, Kamikawa-machi, Kodama-gun, Saitama, **Japan** 367-0242 **(H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations:

Helpful Private Schools — The Venice Community School, 31191 Road 180, Visalia 93292; 209-592-4999

AZ — Telao Home Educators, 520-749-4757 (Tucson)

ME — Home & Unschoolers Group (HUG), RR 1 Box 925E (Biscay & Pinkham Rds), Damariscotta 04543; 207-563-2383

MO — SHELL (Springfield Home Education: Learning for a Lifetime), c/o Donna Culbertson, PO Box 1412, Springfield 65801-1412; 417-862-0520; cwaddell@mail.orion.org

NY — New York Home Educators' Network, Anne Hodge, 39 North St, Saratoga Spgs 12866; 518-584-9110

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1998 Directory (GWS #120)? Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

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Canada -
AB — Alternative Education Resource Assoc, 11 Mosely Close, Red Deer T4N 5S8
NS — Nova Scotia Home Education Assoc, c/o Marion Homer, RR 1, Rose Bay B0J 2X0; 902-766-4355; marion.f.homer@ns.sympatico.ca

Groups to delete:
IL — Unschoolers Network (Arlington Hts)

Address Changes:
CA — California Homeschool Network, PO Box 55485, Hayward 94545; 1-800-327-5339
MT — Bozeman Homeschool Network, c/o Lora Dalton, 201 S 6 Av Apt A, Bozeman 59715; 406-586-3499; Dalton@yesi.net (formerly Independent Homeschoolers Network of Bozeman)

Additions to Resources

Complete lists were published in GWS #121; next complete lists will be published in GWS #127.

Certified Teachers:

ME — Sally Embert, 129 Smutty Ln, Saco 04072; 207-286-1602 (experienced evaluator and curriculum developer)

Psychologists/therapists/counselors:

IL — Rose Mattox, LCPC, American Whole Health Inc., 990 W Fullerton Av Suite 300, Chicago 60130; 773-296-6700

MA — Lise D. Rubin, 25 Oakland Rd, Sharon 02067; 781-784-5718 (certified school psychologist, certified K-8, Special ed; occupational therapist)

WA — Molly Davis, MSW, LCSW, 6320-192 Street SE, Snohomish 98296; 360-668-1496 (willing to work over the telephone)

Subscriptions & Renewals

Subscriptions start with the next issue published. Our current rates are $25 for 6 issues, $45 for 12 issues, $60 for 18 issues. GWS is published every other month. A single issue costs $6.

Rates for **Canadian** subscribers: $29/yr. **Outside of North America**: $40/yr airmail, $29/yr surface mail (allow 2-3 months). Subscribers in U.S. territories pay U.S. rates.

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Renewals: At the right is a form you can use to renew your subscription. Please help us by renewing early.

How can you tell when your subscription expires? Look at this sample label:

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16 MAIN ST
PLAINVILLE NY 01111

The number that is underlined in the example tells the date of the final issue for the subscription. The Smiths' sub expires with our 12/1/98 issue (#126, the next issue, which will say Jan./Feb. 1999 on the cover). But if we were to receive their renewal before the end of the previous month (11/30), they would qualify for the free bonus issue.

Back issues: Many of our back issues are still available, and we are happy to select back issues on any topic that interests you. Tell us how many issues you want, and on what topics, enclose the appropriate payment, and we'll select the best issues for you. Issues cost $3 each for subscribers, plus a flat rate of $3 postage per order; for non-subscribers, the rate is $6 per issue, postage paid.

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Send for your free copy of my free zine for teen unschoolers. *Readers Speak Out!* Ronald Richardson, 4003 50th Ave SW, Seattle WA 98116.

DRAWBRIDGE young adult history magazine. Copies $2.50. 28 Oak Drive, Upton, MA 01568.

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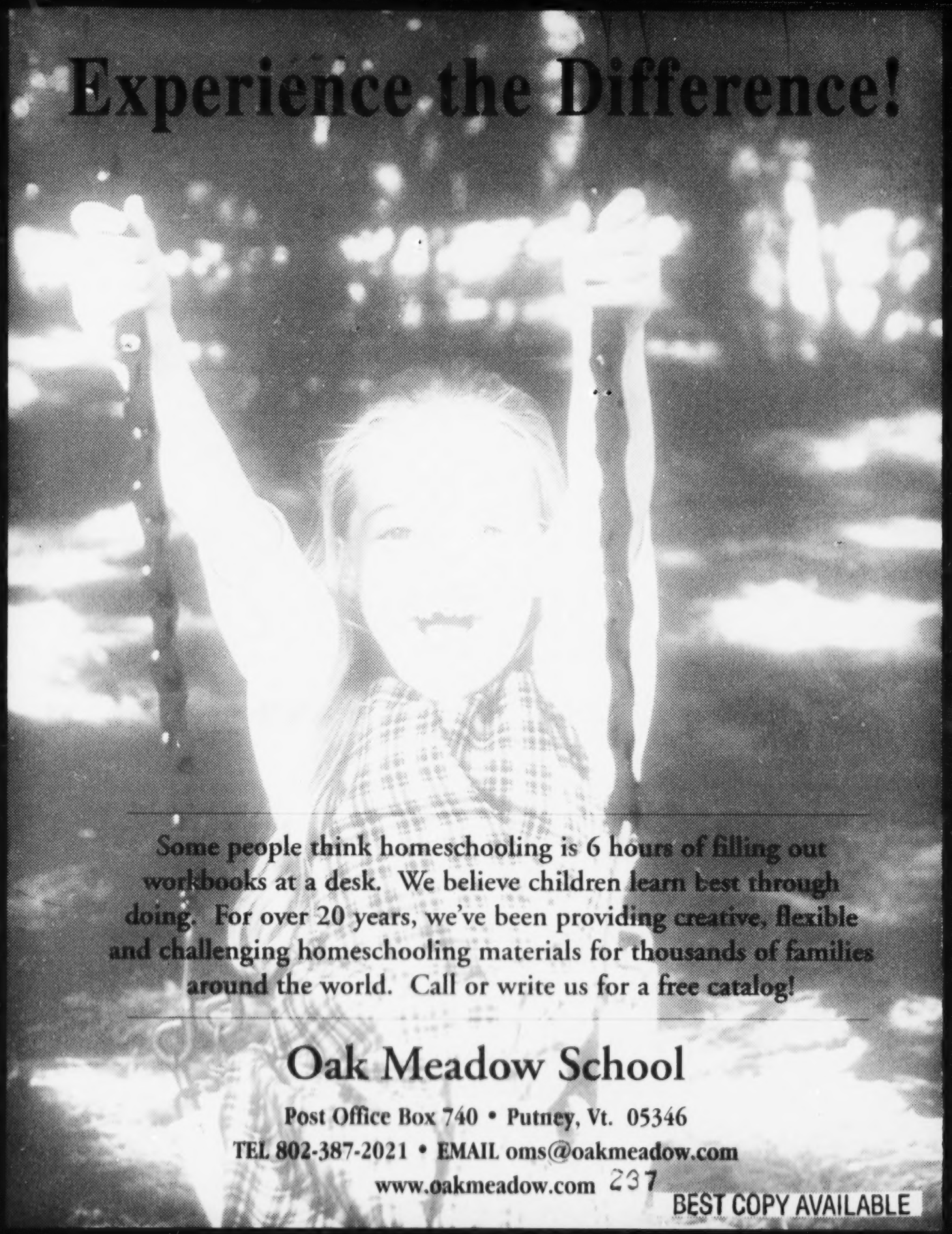
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